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EXILES OF ETERNITY

Le Intelligenze che sono in esilio della superna patria,
le quali filosofare non possono, perocchè amore è in
loro del tutto spento, e a filosofare come già detto e è
necessario amore

Il Convito, III 13

Criles of Eternity

AN EXPOSITION OF DANTE'S INFERNO

BY THE REV

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TO
MY CONGREGATION

*Il mio bel San Giovanni*¹

PREFACE

THE sub-title of this volume indicates sufficiently its scope and purpose. While there exist many admirable essays, commentaries, and general introductions to the study of Dante, I am not aware of anything in the way of an exposition, canto by canto, *as simple and popular as the nature of the subject allows*. Such an exposition it has been my aim to supply. A glance will show that I have written, not for Dante scholars, but for that large and increasing class of general readers who wish to make acquaintance with the great Italian poet, but find almost insuperable difficulties, partly in his mystical symbolism and partly in the innumerable references to contemporary men and events, now almost entirely forgotten. While it is vain to pretend that these difficulties can be charmed out of existence, I have tried to make them as little of a stumbling-block as possible. My chief aim has been to bring out the general scope of Dante's ethical teaching. For this purpose I have avoided entangling either myself or the reader in mere niceties, ingenuities, and intricacies of interpretation, in which too frequently Dante scholars are tempted to forget the broad outlines of their master's meaning. To

many readers the punishments of the *Inferno* are little more than so many arbitrary and meaningless tortures, suggested by the play of a powerful but savage mediæval imagination, and I have tried to remove this utterly false impression. Once we understand Dante's symbolism, his terrible pictures of pain are seen to be the visible, material, and symbolic forms in which he shadows forth the natural and inevitable moral and spiritual issues of the various sins. Hell as an external place may or may not exist, but he compels us to feel its reality as a state of the wicked and impenitent soul, by showing us the awful recoil of its own evil on itself.

The interpretation given has no special claim to originality. On the contrary, I have regarded it as part of the duty of an expositor of Dante to avail himself as widely as possible of help from previous workers in the same field, and to be more anxious to discover the true meaning than to set forth any private interpretation of his own. I have to some extent acknowledged my obligations in the footnotes, but of course it is impossible to name every author to whom one is indebted. Vernon's *Readings on the Inferno* and Toynbee's *Dante Dictionary* have been specially helpful. The references to Dante's own works are from Dr Moore's Oxford edition. Speaking generally, the translation of the *Commedia*, quoted is Longfellow's, of the *Convito*

PREFACE

IX

Miss Hillard's, of the *Vita Nuova* Rossetti's, and of the *De Monarchia* Church's, but I have not thought it necessary in every instance to keep rigidly to the *ipsissima verba* of these versions. Constant reference has been made throughout the exposition to the writings of Dante's great ethical authorities, Aristotle and St Thomas Aquinas; but my chief aim has been to make Dante his own interpreter. His principal works are so interwoven with one another that any satisfactory interpretation of the *Inferno* must bear a constant reference, not only to the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, but also to the *Vita Nuova*, the *Convito*, the *De Monarchia*, and the *Letters*. One value of this reference is that interest is enlisted in Dante's works as a whole.

Whether my hope of completing the exposition of the poem be ever fulfilled, it would be a pleasure to think that the present volume has induced some readers to make acquaintance with the infinitely fairer and nobler universe of spirit unfolded in the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. No man understands Dante until he has climbed with him the 'longer stairway.'

JOHN S CARROLL

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‘Dante, pacer of the shore
Where gluttoned hell disgorgeth filthiest gloom,
Unbitten by its whirring sulphur-spume--
Or whence the grieved and obscure waters slope
Into a darkness quieted by hope ,
Plucker of amaranths grown beneath God's eye
In gracious twilights where His chosen lie ’

BROWNING'S *Sordello*

DANTE ALIGHIERI

ONE of the principal difficulties in writing a life of Dante arises from the phenomenal nature of his mind. There is no poet of the first rank whose writings are so full of his own personality: the history of Florence, of Italy, for that matter of the universe, visible and invisible, crystallizes round himself and his fortunes. Our first thought is that this will make the writing of his life an easy task, but it is far otherwise. The very structure of Dante's mind half reveals and half conceals the facts 'His nature,' says Lowell, 'was one in which, as in Swedenborg's, a clear practical understanding was continually streamed over by the northern lights of mysticism' ¹ No man ever saw facts with clearer eyes, but also no man ever had a more tantalizing genius for concealing them under a veil of allegory. The result is that while his writings are full to overflowing of the events of his life, it is often impossible to say with certainty what exactly the events are,—how much is fact, how much figure

A further difficulty springs from the difference between his contemporaries' estimate of Dante and our own, a difference which we are too apt to forget. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that to us his

¹ Essay on Dante, *Among my Books*

age lives through him and through him alone. Some obscure Florentine becomes immortal because Dante names him, a Council meeting interesting because Dante was present, a battle memorable because Dante fought at it. But of all this his contemporaries knew nothing. No prophetic instinct warned them that the exile, driven about like a battered hulk by 'the dry winds of poverty,' was one concerning whom future generations would ransack all Italy to discover one little fact, and that wherever his feet had wandered would become a place of pilgrimage. No one dreamed that it would be worth while to preserve any record of his deeds or journeyings. When, a generation or two later, men began to suspect the greatness of the spirit that had walked amongst them, it was too late: the facts were irrecoverably gone, like the Sybil's leaves upon the wind, and little remained but the myths and legends which gather round every great name. These, begun by the inveterate romancer Boccaccio, have been handed down as history from commentator to commentator, until now it is almost impossible to disentangle fact from fiction. 'A complete biography of the poet,' declares Scartazzini, 'free from gaps and properly rounded off, cannot be written in the existing state of scientific research'¹. On the other hand, however, it is quite possible to exaggerate the importance of this uncertainty. The larger outlines of the life are not doubtful, and, after all, the real life of Dante consists far less in its external events than in the thoughts and emotions which

¹ *A Companion to Dante* (English Translation), p. 30

they roused in his mind and soul. It is only the larger outlines which can be here attempted, especially as these become visible, more or less dimly, through the veil of his own writings. *

, Dante—or, to give the full form, Durante—Alighieri Dante's Birth
May 1265
was born in Florence in the year 1265. The month was May, but the exact day is uncertain. In the *Paradiso* (xxii 106-117) he tells us that he 'first felt the Tuscan air' under the sign of Gemini, to which he owed all his genius, 'whatsoever it may be.' In 1265 it has been calculated that the sun entered this sign on May 18, and left it on June 17. Dante's birthday therefore lies between these two dates; and the 30th of May has been suggested as being the *festa* of Lucia, his patron saint, who comes to his aid more than once in the *Commedia*.¹ Of his ancestors almost nothing is known beyond what he Ancestors
Cacciaguida
(c. 1090-1147) himself tells us. In the Heaven of Mars he meets his crusading forefather, Cacciaguida, and confesses that even in Paradise he could not restrain a thrill of pride for 'our poor nobility of blood.' This Cacciaguida was his great-great-grandfather, who joined the Emperor, Conrad III., in the disastrous Second Crusade for which St. Bernard was responsible, was knighted by him for his noble deeds, and laid down his life for Holy Land. He gives Dante an outline of his life.

'In your ancient Baptistery at once
Christan and Cacciaguida I became
Moronto was my brother and Eliseo,
My wife came to me from Val di Pado,

¹ *Inf.* li 94-117, *Purg.* ix 49-68. St. Bernard points out her place in the Rose of Paradise (*Par.* xxxii. 136-138). See also pp 39, 40

And from her thy surname was derived
 I followed afterward the Emperor Conrad,
 And he begirt me of his chivalry,
 So much by good work came I into grace
 After him I went 'gainst the iniquity
 Of that law, whose people doth usurp
 Your just possession, through the Pastor's fault
 There was I at the hands of that foul folk
 Unswathed of the deceitful world,
 The love of which full many a soul befouls,
 And came from martyrdom unto this peace¹

Cacciaguida's wife is supposed to have been one of the Alighieri of Ferrara, and it is interesting to know that it is from her Dante's surname comes.² From the mention of Eliseo, Boccaccio asserts that he was descended from the Elisei, an ancient Roman family, but of this there is no proof. When Dante asks for further information of his ancestors, Cacciaguida declines to give it.

'Suffice it of my forbears to hear this,
 Who they were, and whence they hither came,
 Silence is more honourable than speech'³

It is impossible to say with any certainty the reason for this strange reticence. It may be a confession of Dante's own ignorance, but from its context it seems rather the silence of humility which befits Paradise. From other passages it appears certain that Dante believed himself to be of the ancient

¹ *Par.* xv 134-148

² The derivation of Alighieri, or Aldighieri, has exercised the ingenuity of commentators. Federn says confidently it is 'a German name, and most probably derived from "Aldiger," which has about the same significance as the word "Shakespeare," meaning "the ruler of the spear"' Other derive it from *alga*, the sea-weed in which the swampy valley of the Po abounds.

³ *Par.* xvi 43-45,

Roman stock,¹ but Cacciaguida refuses to encourage this pride of blood. It is probably as a warning against it that he tells him how his own son, Dante's great-grandfather, Alighiero, has been circling the Terrace of Pride on Mount Purgatory for more than a hundred years.² The only other member of the house named is one of whom there was no temptation to be proud—a certain Geri del Bello, a first cousin of Dante's father, a quarrelsome man who stirred up strife among the Sacchetti, and was stabbed for his pains by a member of that family. In the Bolgia of the Schismatics in the Eighth Circle of Hell, Virgil saw him pointing threateningly at Dante for having left his death unavenged.³

Of his parents Dante makes no mention whatever, **His Parents** except in the most indirect way. His father is said to have been a notary of Florence. He was twice married, and Dante was the son of his first wife, Bella, of whose family nothing whatever seems to be certainly known. A single line in the *Commedia* is her only memorial.⁴

The great and decisive event of Dante's boyhood, **Beatrice and youth, and early manhood—indeed, of his whole life** *La Vita Nuova*. —was his love of Beatrice, narrated in his first work, the *Vita Nuova*. The title indicates, doubtless, the new existence into which this great passion ushered him. The story is told with a peculiar ethereal and dreamlike purity and beauty, and indeed it is

¹ *Inf* xv 73-78, etc.

² *Par* xv 91-96

³ *Inf* xxix 136. See page 396

⁴ *Inf* viii 45. *Comp Conv* i 13, where, speaking of the benefits he had received from his native tongue, he says 'this my language (*Volgare*) was the uniter of my parents, who spoke with it, and thus was one of the causes of my being.'

largely composed of dreams. It consists of a series of poems interpreted by a prose commentary. Norton has shown that the book is most symmetrically constructed, and falls into three divisions of ten poems each.¹ The first (sections 1-xvi) relates the beginning of his love and its extraordinary effects upon himself. He saw this 'youngest of the Angels' for the first time when she was at the beginning, and he at the end, of their ninth year. In his eighteenth year he met her in the street, and for the first time received her salutation. It threw him into a dream of terror and of joy. Love, a lord of terrible aspect outwardly but full of joy within, appeared to him in a cloud of fire, bearing in his arms 'the Lady of the salutation,' asleep, and covered with a blood-red cloth. In his hand he held Dante's own heart which was all on fire, and, awaking the lady, he forced her to eat it, which she did as one in fear. 'Then, having waited again a space, all his joy was turned into most bitter weeping, and as he wept he gathered the lady into his arms, and it seemed to me that he went with her up towards heaven whereby such a great anguish came upon me that my light slumber could not endure through it, but was suddenly broken.'² It is obviously his first premonition of the early death of Beatrice. The dream made him a poet. He related it in the first Sonnet of *The New Life*, which he sent to the famous poets of the day for their interpretation. One of the answers came in a Sonnet from Guido

¹ See Essay 'On the Structure of the *Vita Nuova*' in Charles E. Norton's Translation of *The New Life*, pp. 129-134

² V. N. III The passages quoted are from Rossetti's translation

Cavalcanti, whom Dante henceforth called 'the first among his friends.'¹ To conceal his love he tells us that he used several ladies as screens, and with such unhappy success that Beatrice, hearing rumours which 'seemed to misfame him of vice,' denied him her salutation, and even mocked him at a marriage festivity.

The second division of the *Vita Nuova* extends from section xvii. to section xxx. The refusal by Beatrice of her salutation which had hitherto been his highest bliss, made him resolve to fall back upon another beatitude which could never fail · he begins 'new matter'—*materia nuova*—'more noble than the foregoing.' He has spoken sufficiently of himself and his condition, he will henceforth speak only of his lady's praise. But mingling with this praise come renewed premonitions of her early death. A sickness falls upon himself, and, musing on the frail thread of his own life, the thought suddenly came: 'Of necessity it must be that the most gentle Beatrice shall some time die' In the delirium of his sickness he has a vision of her passing to Paradise. 'And at the first, it seemed to me that I saw certain faces of women with their hair loosened, which called out to me, "Thou shalt surely die", after the which, other terrible and unknown appearances said unto me, "Thou art dead" At length, as my phantasy held on in its wanderings, I came to be I knew not where, and to behold a throng of dishevelled ladies wonderfully sad, who kept going hither and thither weeping.

¹ Rossetti in *Dante and his Circle* translates three of these replies Guido Cavalcanti's (p. 131), Cino da Pistoia's (p. 183), and Dante da Maiano's (p. 198). The last tells Dante to consult a doctor for such delirium.

Then the sun went out, so that the stars showed themselves, and they were of such a colour that I knew they must be weeping. and it seemed to me that the birds fell dead out of the sky, and that there were great earthquakes. With that, while I wondered in my trance, and was filled with a grievous fear, I conceived that a certain friend came unto me and said "Hast thou not heard? She that was thine excellent lady hath been taken out of life" Then I began to weep very piteously, and not only in mine imagination, but with mine eyes, which were wet with tears. And I seemed to look towards Heaven, and to behold a multitude of angels who were returning upwards, having before them an exceedingly white cloud and these angels were singing together gloriously, and the words of their song were these "*Osanna in excelsis*", and there was no more that I heard Then my heart that was so full of love said unto me "It is true that our lady lieth dead", and it seemed to me that I went to look upon the body wherein that blessed and most noble spirit had had its abiding-place. And so strong was this idle imagining, that it made me to behold my lady in death; whose head certain ladies seemed to be covering with a white veil, and who was so humble of her aspect that it was as though she had said, "I have attained to look on the beginning of peace."¹ It was not long till the vision was fulfilled A canzone which he was writing in her praise is suddenly broken off with the opening words of the *Lamentations of Jeremiah Quomodo*

¹ V. N. xxiii.

sedet sola civitas plena populo! facta est quasi vidua domina gentium! 'I was still occupied with this poem (having composed thereof only the above written stanza,) when the Lord God of justice called my most gracious lady unto Himself, that she might be glorious under the banner of that blessed Queen Mary, whose name had always a deep reverence in the words of holy Beatrice.'¹

The final sections (xxxi-xlhii) take up a new The Donna
Pietosa theme—*nuova materia*—the various phases of his grief, the greatest grief of all being a temptation to forget it. 'O last regret, regret can die!' One day struggling with his sorrow, and looking up in fear lest he was observed, 'I saw,' he says, 'a young and very beautiful lady, who was gazing upon me from a window with a gaze full of pity, so that the very sum of pity appeared gathered together in her' She reminded him of his own 'most noble lady who was wont to be of a like paleness.' His eyes began to be gladdened with her company overmuch, and he cursed them bitterly for their inconstancy. The struggle was decided by another vision. 'There rose up in me on a certain day, about the ninth hour, a strong visible phantasy, wherein I seemed to behold the most gracious Beatrice, habited in that crimson raiment which she had worn when I had first beheld her, also she appeared to me of the same tender age as then. Whereupon I fell into a deep thought of her; and my memory ran back, according to the order of time, unto all those matters in the which she had borne a part; and my heart began painfully

to repent of the desire by which it had so basely let itself be possessed during so many days, contrary to the constancy of reason And then, this evil desire being quite gone from me, all my thoughts turned again unto their excellent Beatrice And I say most truly that from that hour I thought constantly of her with the whole humbled and ashamed heart.¹ A final vision determined him to say no more until he could write of her what had never been written of any woman The reference is, without doubt, to the *Divina Commedia*²

Beatrice
Portinari

It is impossible to enter at any length into the problem of the identity of Beatrice: each reader will decide it according to the general conception which he forms of Dante and his works. The idea, however, that she was a mere spiritual abstraction is quite inconsistent with Dante's genius. However much he might allegorize, it lay in the very nature of his mind to start from some concrete and literal fact.³ Tradition, following Boccaccio and Dante's own son, Pietro, has identified her with Beatrice, daughter of Folco Portinari, a wealthy and much esteemed citizen of Florence, and we know that in 1287 this lady married Simone de' Bardi, and died on June 8, 1290, at the age of twenty-four Whether it was Beatrice Portinari or another, it is plain that from the first Dante's intensely mystical imagination began to invest her with strange symbolic meanings

¹ ¶ N xl

² The passage is quoted on p 43

³ Federn (*Dante and his Time*, 222 n) points out that 'if Beatrice were a solemn and allegoric name, Dante never would have used the tender abbreviation of "Bice," and spoken of her in the same breath with "Yanna" (Jennie), Guido's love,' as he does in Sonnet xiv of the *Vita Nuova* (section xxiv) and in Sonnet xxxii See also *Par* vii, 14.

and correspondences. In her, he says, Homer's words are fulfilled. 'She seemed not to be the daughter of mortal man, but of God' Her salutation destroyed every evil passion. 'When she appeared in any place, it seemed to me, by the hope of her excellent salutation, that there was no man mine enemy any longer, and such warmth of charity came upon me that most certainly in that moment I would have pardoned whosoever had done me an injury' 'This excellent lady came at last into such favour with all men, that when she passed anywhere folk ran to behold her, which thing was a deep joy to me and when she drew near unto any, so much truth and simpleness entered into his heart, that he dared neither to lift his eyes nor to return her salutation and unto this many who have felt it can bear witness She went along crowned and clothed with humility, showing no whit of pride in all that she heard and saw and when she had gone by, it was said of many, "This is not a woman, but one of the beautiful angels of Heaven"; and there were some that said, "This is surely a miracle; blessed be the Lord, who hath power to work thus marvellously" ¹ Her death completed the process of spiritual idealization—she is transformed into 'a miracle whose only root is the Holy Trinity' He explains why the number nine is so friendly to Beatrice and Beatrice 'I say, then, that according to the division of time in Italy, her most noble spirit departed from among us in the first hour of the ninth day of the month, and according to the division of time in

Her Trans-
figuration

Beatrice and
the Number
Nine

¹ V. N. xi, xxvi

Syria, in the ninth month of the year. seeing that Tismim, which with us is October, is there the first month Also she was taken from among us in that year of our reckoning (to wit, of the years of our Lord) in which the perfect number was nine times multiplied within that century wherein she was born into the world · which is to say, the thirteenth century of Christians.

‘And touching the reason why this number was so closely allied unto her, it may peradventure be this According to Ptolemy, (and also to the Christian verity,) the revolving heavens are nine, and according to the common opinion among astiologers, these nine heavens together have influence over the earth. Wherefore it would appear that this number was thus allied unto her for the purpose of signifying that, at her birth, all these nine heavens were at perfect unity with each other as to their influence. This is one reason that may be brought but more narrowly considering, and according to the infallible truth, this number was her own self that is to say, by similitude As thus The number three is the root of the number nine, seeing that without the interposition of any other number, being multiplied merely by itself, it produceth nine, as we manifestly perceive that three times three are nine Thus, three being of itself the efficient of nine, and the Great Efficient of Miracles being of Himself Three Persons (to wit · the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit), which, being Three, are also One.—this lady was accompanied by the number nine to the end that men might clearly perceive her to be a nine,

that is, a miracle, whose only root is the Holy Trinity. It may be that a more subtle person would find for this thing a reason of greater subtlety: but such is the reason that I find, and that liketh me best.¹ The 'more subtle person' is perhaps one of Dante's commentators.

Those writers who regard Beatrice as a mere abstraction, say for Theology or the Church, appeal to the *Convito*, Dante's second great work, which undoubtedly has an intimate and mysterious connection with the *Vita Nuova*. When it was written is very uncertain—probably at various dates during the earlier years of his exile.² Dante's original intention was to take fourteen of his canzoni and write on each a commentary, thus forming, as one says, a kind of treasury of universal knowledge in fourteen books. The plan was never carried beyond the fourth, Book I being an introduction to the whole. It is called the *Convito* or *Banquet*, because it was Dante's wish to spread a feast of wisdom, 'bread of the angels,' for the multitude, the unlearned crowd, who else must 'feed in common with the sheep.' It is, in short, as Wicksteed says, 'an attempt to throw into popular form the matter of the Aristotelian treatises of Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas,' and is therefore of the first importance for the interpretation of the *Commedia*, which cannot be fully understood without it. As its relation to the *Vita Nuova* is at once

¹ *V N* xxx. For Tismun, or Tismum, as Rossetti has it, Moore reads Tisrin, the Syrian month Tisryn, as given by the Arabian astronomer, Alfraganus (see Toynbee's *Dante Dictionary*).

² See, however, Miss Hillard's discussion of the chronology in the introduction to her translation of the *Convito* (pp. xvii xxxiv).

close and mysterious. We saw that Dante after the death of Beatrice was tempted to find consolation in the *donna pietosa*, the young and beautiful lady who looked at him from a window with eyes of pity, and that after a severe struggle with himself he turned away from the thought of her as a base treachery to Beatrice. Now, had he written nothing more of this Lady of Pity, we should have had little doubt of these three things that she was a real woman, that he regarded his desire for her as base, and that he abandoned her society. But in the *Convito* he denies all three she was not a real woman, but Philosophy, so far from being evil, Philosophy is Divine, and instead of abandoning her, he gave himself up delightedly to the most passionate love of her. He tells us that what moves him to say this is 'the fear of infamy'—the infamy of passion and inconstancy. Many having accused him of having 'changed from his first love,' he judges that his best defence is simply to tell who this lady is who had so changed him. 'I say and affirm that the lady with whom I was enamoured, after my first love, was the most beautiful and most virtuous daughter of the Emperor of the Universe, to whom Pythagoras gives the name of *Philosophy*.' 'This Lady is Philosophy, who is truly a lady full of sweetness, adorned with virtue, wonderful in knowledge, glorious in liberty.' 'God, who comprehends all things, sees nothing so fair as when he looks upon the place where this Philosophy is. For Philosophy is a loving use of Wisdom, which exists above all in God, because in Him is supreme Wisdom, and

supreme Love, and supreme Power . . . Oh, most noble and most excellent heart, that hath communion with the Bride of the Emperor of Heaven! and not Bride only but most delectable Sister and Daughter!' ¹ How this can be in any sense a description of the Lady of Pity in *The New Life*, from whom Dante tore himself away as from a temptress, it is impossible to say. It is, however, argued by some writers that if this *donna pietosa* is an abstraction for Philosophy and nothing more, Beatrice herself is equally an abstraction for Theology and nothing more; and that the sin which Beatrice on the top of Mount Purgatory drives home so sternly on Dante's conscience, is simply that of abandoning Theology for the study of worldly philosophy and science ² Against this, however, is the fact that while Dante in the *Convito* freely and explicitly allegorizes the pitiful Lady of the window, there is not a syllable of a similar treatment of Beatrice. It is likely to remain one of the many unsolved problems of Dante's life and character. Perhaps, as Lowell suggests, this transformation of the Lady of Pity into Philosophy was an illusion of memory. 'Such idealizations have a very subtle retrospective action, and the new condition of thought and feeling is uneasy till it has half unconsciously brought into harmony whatever is inconsistent with it in the past. . . . Dante in his exposition of the *Canzoni* must have been subject to this subtlest and most deceitful of influences. He would try to reconcile so far as he con-

¹ *Conv* i 2, ii 18, iii 1, etc

² *Purg* xxv 55 xxxi 90, xxxiii 85-90 See pp 11 14

scientiously could his present with his past. This he could do by means of the allegorical interpretation.' Gardner thinks that on the top of Mount Purgatory he dropped this delusive allegorical veil of self-justification, and at last confessed the naked truth.¹

**Dante's
Education**

The education of Dante is involved in a mystery almost as great. His writings are a perfect mine of mediæval learning 'He anticipated,' says Hettinger, 'the most pregnant developments of Catholic doctrine, mastered its subtlest distinctions, and treated its hardest problems with almost faultless accuracy. Were all the libraries in the world destroyed, and the Holy Scriptures with them, the whole Catholic system of doctrine and morals might be almost reconstructed out of the *Divina Commedia*.'² How this vast knowledge was acquired is virtually unknown. Various conjectures have been made. Plumptre supposes that Dante, after the custom of boys of the Middle Ages, went forth to see the world, wandering from university to university in search of knowledge. He constructs a romance of 'the student's *wanderyahre*,' in which the young Florentine visits the universities of Bologna, Padua, Paris, and even Oxford. The chief grounds for this romance are the many traces of travel scattered throughout the *Commedia*, but the obvious answer is that these may refer to the wanderings of his exile.³ The view once

¹ *Dante* (Temple Primers Series), p. 63

² *Dante's Divina Commedia*, p. 234 Dr. Hettinger writes from the Roman Catholic standpoint.

³ Plumptre's *Dante*, I. Life, xli. 'From a phrase of Boccaccio in a Latin poem addressed to Petrarca, in which he mentions "*Parisios demum extremosque Britannos*" among the places visited by Dante, it has been assumed that Dante came to England, and Giovanni Serra

almost universally held that his tutor was Brunetto Latini, secretary to the Florentine government, is now generally abandoned, although it is obvious from Dante's warm gratitude that he owed much to Brunetto's kind and fatherly guidance and encouragement¹. A third view has much in its favour, namely, that Dante was, to all intents and purposes, a self-taught man. In his youth he had received a good education, as the *Vita Nuova* shows, but up to his twenty-fifth year he had probably attended no university. It was only after the death of Beatrice, partly to prepare himself for writing some great work in her praise, and partly to conquer his grief, that he threw himself seriously into the study of science and philosophy. In the *Convito* he gives the following account of himself at this period. 'After some time, my mind, which was struggling to regain its health, saw that it was necessary (as neither mine own nor others' consolation was of any avail) to try the plan which another disconsolate one had adopted to console himself. And I set myself to read that book of Boethius, not known to many, wherewith, a prisoner and banished, he had comforted himself. And again, hearing that Tullius had written another book, in which, treating of *Friendship*, he had spoken consoling words to Laelius, a most excellent man, on the death of his friend Scipio, I set myself to read that. And although at first it was hard for me to under-

Studies after
the death of
Beatrice

valle, in a commentary on the *D C* written at the beginning of Cent. xv, goes the length of stating that he studied at Oxford. In the absence of more trustworthy evidence, the fact of this alleged visit to England must be regarded as extremely doubtful' (Toynbee's *Dante Dictionary*).

¹ *Inf* xv 79-87. See pp 232-237.

stand their meaning, I finally made out as much as what art of grammar I possessed, together with some little intellectual power of my own, enabled me to do; by the which intellectual power I had already beheld many things, as it were dreaming, as may be seen in the *Vita Nuova*. And just as if a man should go about looking for silver, and apart from his purpose should find gold (which some occult cause presented, perhaps not without Divine ordinance), so I, who sought to console myself, found not only a remedy for my tears, but sayings of authors, and of sciences, and of books, considering which, I soon decided that Philosophy, who was the sovereign lady of these authors, these sciences, and these books, was the supreme thing. And I imagined her as a noble lady, and I could not imagine her as other than merciful, wherefore so willingly did my sense of Truth behold her that it could scarcely be diverted from her. And on account of this imagination I began to go where she in truth showed herself, that is, in the schools of the religious and the disputations of the philosophers, so that, in a little while, perhaps thirty months, I began to be so deeply aware of her sweetness, that the love of her banished and destroyed every other thought.¹ In addition to this, his contemporary and neighbour in Florence, Giovanni Villani, says that after his banishment, 'he went to study at Bologna, and afterwards at Paris, and in many parts of the world',² but doubtless Scartazzini is not far wrong in supposing that the

¹ *Conv.* ii 13. The two books named are Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiæ* and Cicero's *De Amicitia*. For connection of the passage with the Savage Wood, see pp. 9 11.

² *Chronicle*, Bk. ix. ch. 136.

necessity of earning his bread made him frequent the universities no less as teacher than as student.¹ However he gained his vast learning, he speaks of it with great humility 'I who do not sit at the blessed table (*i.e.* where Wisdom, 'the bread of the angels,' is dispensed), but have fled from the pasture of the herd, and at the feet of them who are seated there, gather up what they let fall.'²

The death of Beatrice was obviously a critical **His Marriage.** turning-point in Dante's moral life. There are passages in the *Commedia* to which it seems almost impossible to give any real meaning, except on the supposition that they refer to certain moral lapses of this period. It may have been on this account that his friends, if Boccaccio is to be believed, arranged his marriage with Gemma Donati, some time between 1291 and 1296. Of this lady little is known beyond that she was a distant kinswoman of the haughty and ambitious Corso Donati, to whom Dante owed his banishment,³ that she bore Dante at least four children, two sons, Pietro and Jacopo, and two daughters, Antonia and Beatrice, and that she did not join her husband in his exile. From this last fact Boccaccio has given currency to the impression which has prevailed ever since, that the marriage was an unhappy one, and that Gemma was a veritable Xanthippe. After expatiating at great length on the discomforts marriage *might* have caused the poet,

¹ *A Companion to Dante*, Part II ch. II — *Student or Teacher?*

² *Conv.* I. I. Dante evidently regards himself as a *dilettante*, a mere 'picker up of learning's crumbs.'

³ Dante speaks affectionately of Corso's brother Forese (*Purg.* xxiii, xxiv), and of his sister Piccarda (*Purg.* xxiv 10, *Par.* iii). Corso's death is foretold by Forese in *Purg.* xxiv 82-87.

he winds up: 'I certainly do not say that all this happened in Dante's case, because I do not know it; but, whether that be the truth or not, Dante when once parted from his wife—who, it will be remembered, had been supplied to him as a consolation in trouble—would never come where she was, nor allow her to come to him' It is probable, of course, that Gemma, in common with the rest of the world, was unable to understand and appreciate her husband's genius, but there is no definite ground for the hostile view generally taken of her¹ It is true, Dante never mentions her in his writings, nor did she join him in his exile The homeless man had enough to do to maintain himself, and it was mere prudence for his wife to remain behind in Florence and provide for herself and their children out of the revenues of her dowry—meagrely enough, as Boccaccio admits, for she had to betake herself to 'unaccustomed toil' In this struggle surely she had the sympathy and approval of her husband; and if she had not, we may well spare from the transfigured and glorified Beatrice one pitying thought for the lonely wife, 'unwept, unhonoured, and unsung'

Public Life
War

Dreamer, poet, and student as he was, Dante nevertheless took the keenest interest in the public affairs of his time and city At the age of twenty-four, he had already borne arms for his country He belonged to a Guelph family, and one of his early biographers, Lionardo Bruni, says that he was

¹ It is surely unnecessary to suppose that when Forese Donati denounces the women of Florence for shamelessness (*Purg* xxiii 94-111), Dante meant to include his own wife in the general condemnation

present, fighting vigorously in the very front rank, at the battle of Campaldino in 1289, when the Florentine Guelphs inflicted a crushing defeat on the Ghibellines of Arezzo. He quotes from a letter now lost in which Dante speaks of 'the battle of Campaldino in which the Ghibelline party was almost destroyed and undone, where I found myself,' he says, 'no child in arms, and where I had much fear, and in the end very great joy through the varying chances of that battle'. In the *Inferno* (xxi. 93-96) he tells us he was present at the taking of the castle of Caprona near Pisa in the same year, and saw the terror of the garrison as they marched out, lest the besiegers should break the terms of surrender and slay them on the spot.

In 1295 or 1296 Dante enrolled himself as *poeta* Politics *Florentino* in the Guild of Physicians and Apothecaries, this being the necessary preliminary to his taking any part in the government of the city. In 1300 he went as ambassador to San Gimignano near Siena, to invite its citizens to send representatives to an assembly about to be held for the purpose of electing a new Captain of the Guelph League of Tuscany. In the same year he was elected one of the six Priors of Florence, his term of office running from June 15 to August 15. In the letter already quoted by Bruni, Dante traces his subsequent misfortunes to this election. 'All my ills and all my troubles had their beginning and origin from my unlucky election as Prior. Though in respect of mature wisdom I was not worthy of this office, yet in loyalty I was not unworthy of it, nor in age, for

His Priorate
June 15 Aug
15, 1300

ten years had elapsed since the battle of Campaldino.'

Guelphs and
Ghibellines

At this point it becomes necessary to say a word about those faction-names which are of such constant recurrence in the wild and tangled politics of mediæval Italy,—Guelphs and Ghibellines. The words came from Germany. Guelph from *Welf*, the name of the powerful family of the Counts of Altdorf, and Ghibelline from *Weiblingen*, a castle in Franconia belonging to the great Swabian house of the Hohenstaufen. At the battle of Weinsberg in 1140 between these rival houses, 'the names Welf and Weiblingen were for the first time adopted as war-cries, which were subsequently naturalized in Italy as *Guelfo* and *Ghibellino*, and became the distinctive appellations of the opposing factions of the Pope and the Emperor.' It is, however, much too simple a view to say that the Guelphs were Papalists and the Ghibellines Imperialists. In course of time the original principles were swept into the background, 'the spirit of faction outlived the cause of faction,' and the imperial and papal titles became mere labels covering every kind of feud and discord—national and local, class, family, and individual. Each side cared for the cause of Pope or Emperor just so far as Pope or Emperor enabled them to gain their own ends and drive their rivals into exile. As Dean Church says 'The names of Guelf and Ghibelline were the inheritance of a contest which, in its original meaning, had been long over. The old struggle between the priesthood and the empire was still kept up traditionally, but its ideas and interests

were changed. they were still great and important ones, but not those of Gregory VII. It had passed over from the mixed region of the spiritual and temporal into the purely political. The cause of the popes was that of the independence of Italy—the freedom and alliance of the great cities of the north, and the dependence of the centre and south on the Roman See To keep the Emperor out of Italy—to create a barrier of powerful cities against him south of the Alps—to form behind themselves a compact territory, rich, removed from the first burst of invasion, and maintaining a strong body of interested feudatories, had now become the great object of the popes. . . The two parties did not care to keep in view principles which their chiefs had lost sight of The Emperor and the Pope were both real powers, able to protect and assist, and they divided between them those who required protection and assistance Geographical position, the rivalry of neighbourhood, family tradition, private feuds, and above all private interest, were the main causes which assigned cities, families, and individuals to the Ghibelline or Guelf party. One party called themselves the Emperor's liegemen, and their watchword was authority and law, the other side were the liegemen of Holy Church, and their cry was liberty, and the distinction as a broad one is true. But a democracy would become Ghibelline, without scruple, if its neighbour town was Guelf, and among the Guelf liegemen of the Church and liberty the pride of blood and love of power were not a whit inferior to that of their opponents . The Ghibel-

Character
istics of the
two Parties

lines as a body reflected the worldliness, the licence, the irreligion, the reckless selfishness, the daring insolence, and at the same time the gaiety and pomp, the princely magnificence and generosity and largeness of mind of the house of Swabia, they were the men of the court and camp, imperious and haughty from ancient lineage or the Imperial cause, yet not wanting in the frankness and courtesy of nobility, careless of public opinion and public rights, but not dead to the grandeur of public objects and public services. Among them were found, or to them inclined, all who, whether from a base or a lofty ambition, desired to place their will above law—the lord of the feudal castle, the robber-knight of the Apennine pass, the magnificent but terrible tyrants of the cities, the pride and shame of Italy, the Visconti and Scaligers. The Guelfs, on the other hand, were the party of the middle classes, they rose out of and held to the people, they were strong by their compactness, their organisation in cities, their commercial relations and interests, their command of money. Further, they were professedly the party of strictness and religion, a profession which fettered them as little as their opponents were fettered by the respect they claimed for imperial law. But though by personal unscrupulousness and selfishness, and in instances of public vengeance, they sinned as deeply as the Ghibellines, they stood far more committed as a party to a public meaning and purpose—to improvement in law and the condition of the poor, to a protest against the insolence of the strong, to the encouragement of

industry. The genuine Guelf spirit was austere, frugal, independent, earnest, religious, fond of its home and Church, and of those celebrations which bound together Church and home, but withal very proud, very intolerant; in its higher form intolerant of evil, but intolerant always to whatever displeased it.¹

According to Villani, these factions were introduced into Florence in 1215 through the murder of Buondelmonte de' Buondelmonti, but, of course, this was only the occasion, not the cause.² The city became a battlefield. The great families built towers to fight their enemies. 'In these fortresses of the leading families, scattered about the city, were the various points of onset and recovery in civic battle, in the streets barricades were raised, mangonels and crossbows were plied from the towers, a series of separate combats raged through the city, till chance at length connected the attacks of one side, or some panic paralysed the resistance of the other, or a conflagration interposed itself between the combatants, burning out at once Guelf and Ghibelline, and laying half Florence in ashes. Each party had their turn of victory, each, when vanquished, went into exile, and carried on the war outside the walls, each had their opportunity of remodelling the orders and framework of government, and each did so relent-

¹ *Dante An Essay*, pp 14 18. For the connection of Guelphs and Ghibellines with the 'struggle for the supremacy of the mercantile democracy and the Roman Law over the military aristocracy with its "barbarian" traditions,' see Wicksteed's Introduction to *Selections from Villani's Chronicle*, and Prof. Villari's *The Two First Centuries of Florentine History*.

² *Chronicle*, v 38. See pp 392, 393.

lessly at the cost of their opponents. They excluded classes, they proscribed families, they confiscated property, they sacked and burned warehouses, they levelled the palaces, and outraged the pride of their antagonists.¹

Bianchi and
Neri

To increase if possible the horror of this suicidal struggle, a new faction was added in the very year when Dante was elected Prior. In the neighbouring city of Pistoja, a feud had broken out in the Guelph family of the Cancellieri, the two sides being distinguished as Bianchi and Neri, Whites and Blacks. The leaders were arrested and brought to Florence, with the unhappy issue that it also was set ablaze with the same feud. Corso Donati became the head of the Black Guelphs, his rival, Vieri de' Cerchi, of the White. They came to blows in the Piazza di Santa Trinità on May-day 1300, and the strife grew to such a head that Dante and his fellow-Priors found it necessary to banish the leaders of both sides. The Blacks appealed to Pope Boniface VIII, who summoned Charles of Valois, brother of Philip the Fair of France, and sent him as 'peacemaker' to Florence. Dante and the other White Guelphs were violently opposed to his entrance. Dino Compagni (ii 25) says that Dante was among the ambassadors whom the Whites sent to Rome to protest against it, and Boccaccio tells the well-known story that when his name was proposed Dante exclaimed, 'If I go, who remains?' and if I remain, who goes?'—a question which made him many enemies. Dante's embassy to Rome is generally regarded as very doubtful,

Charles of
Valois

¹ Church's *Dante*, pp. 20-21.

but so high an authority as Prof. Villari sees no cause to question it ¹ The only reply the Pope deigned to give to the embassy was the haughty demand, 'Make humiliation to us.' On November 1, 1301, Charles of Valois entered Florence with his men unarmed, and on the 5th, Villani, who was present on the occasion, tells us that he received the lordship of the city in the church of Santa Maria Novella, swearing, on his word 'as the King's son,' to 'preserve the city in peaceful and good state' 'And straightway,' adds Villani, 'the contrary was done by him and by his followers' He armed his horsemen, and the city saw that it had been betrayed Corso Donati and the Neri were admitted, threw open the prisons, and drove the Priors from their Palace 'And,' writes Villani, 'during all this destruction of the city M Charles of Valois and his people gave no counsel nor help, nor did he keep the oath and promise made by him. Wherefore the tyrants and malefactors and banished men who were in the city took courage, and the city being unguarded and without government, they began to rob the shops and places of merchandise and the houses which pertained to the White party, or to any one that had not the power to resist, slaying and wounding many persons, good men of the White party. And this plague endured in the city for five days continually, to the great ruin of the city And afterwards it continued in the country, the troopers going on robbing and burning houses for more than eight days, whereby a great number of beautiful and rich possessions were destroyed and

¹ *The Two First Centuries of Florentine History*, Chap ix § vii n

The Banish-
ment of
Dante Jan
27, 1302

burned. And when the said destruction and burning was ended, M Charles and his council reconstituted the city, and elected a government of Priors of the popolani of the Black party¹ It was in this wild storm that Dante's fortunes went down to rise no more The Neri immediately took their revenge. Dante, who had been among the most resolute of the opponents of Charles and the Pope, was naturally one of the victims On January 27, 1302, a decree of banishment was issued against him and four others They are accused of 'barratry,' that is, corruption and malversation of public funds, opposition to the Pope and the entrance of Charles, and to the peace of Florence and the Guelph party Their failure to appear when summoned by a herald is taken as an acknowledgment of guilt They are sentenced to pay a fine of five thousand gold florins each for contempt of court, and to restore the money they had taken by fraud within three days on pain of confiscation of their property, to suffer banishment from Tuscany for two years, and to have their names inscribed in the Statutes of the People as forgers and barrators who are excluded for ever from holding any public office under the Commune of Florence. On the 10th of March following, a further sentence condemned the five, along with ten others, to perpetual banishment, and, if caught on Florentine soil, to death by burning

His Wander-
ings

'From this time,' says Lowell, 'the life of Dante becomes semi-mythical, and for nearly every date

¹ For an account of the origin of the Black and White factions, their introduction to Florence, and the disastrous consequences to the city, see Villani's *Chronicle*, viii 38 49

we are reduced to the "as they say" of Herodotus. . . . During the nineteen years of his exile, it would be hard to say where he was not. In certain districts of Northern Italy there is scarce a village that has not its tradition of him, its *sedia*, *rocca*, *spelonca*, or *torre di Dante*, and what between the patriotic complaisance of some biographers overwilling to gratify as many provincial vanities as possible, and the pettishness of others anxious only to snub them, the confusion becomes hopeless.' In a pathetic passage in the *Convito* the homeless exile reveals the destitute and far-wandering life he was doomed to lead. 'Since it pleased the citizens of the fairest and most famous daughter of Rome, Florence, to cast me forth from her most sweet bosom (wherein I was born and nourished up to the climax of my life, and wherein by their good leave, I long with all my heart to rest my weary soul, and to end the days allotted to me), through almost every part where her language is spoken I have wandered, a pilgrim, almost a beggar, displaying against my will the wounds of fortune, which are often wont to be imputed unjustly to the wounded one himself Truly have I been a vessel without sail or rudder, borne to divers ports and straits and shores by the dry wind which blows from dolorous poverty, and have appeared vile in the eyes of many who, perhaps, through some fame of me, had imagined me in other guise, in whose consideration not only did I in person suffer abasement, but all my work became of less account, that already done as well as that yet to do '¹ Thus amply

¹ *Conv* 1 3

was his forefather Cacciaguida's well-known prophecy fulfilled:

'Thou shalt abandon everything beloved
Most tenderly, and this the arrow is
Which first the bow of exile shooteth forth
Thou shalt have proof how savoureth of salt
The bread of others, and how hard a road
The going down and up another's stairs '1

With the
Exiled
Ghibellines

It would be vain to attempt to trace his wanderings in detail. He is said to have received the news of his exile in Siena on his way back from Rome. With other White Guelphs he joined the banished Ghibellines, and made common cause with them in their efforts to effect their return to Florence. Several attempts to force their way into the city failed, but what part Dante took in these is uncertain. It was not long till he severed his connection with both Guelphs and Ghibellines, and formed a party by himself. Speaking from the standpoint of 1300, his ancestor foretells this political detachment and isolation

Forms 'a
party by
himself'

' And that which most shall weigh upon thy shoulders
Will be the company malign and stupid
With which thou shalt fall down into this valley,
For all ungrateful, all mad and impious,
Will they become against thee, but soon after
They and not thou shall have the forehead red
Of their bestiality their own procedure
Shall make the proof, so 'twill be well for thee
To have made thee a party by thyself '2

Doubtless his fellow-exiles on their side felt the proud, impracticable, and visionary nature of the

¹ *Par* xvii 55-60

² *Par* xvii 61-69

man, and were probably not unwilling to be rid of him; while Dante must quickly have discovered that their Ghibellinism was not his. The truth is, ^{His Ghibellinism} it is misleading to call Dante a Ghibelline at all, at least in the ordinary meaning of the name. He did, indeed, abandon the Guelph party, in which he was born and bred, but he found that the Ghibellines with whom he acted for a time regarded the Empire as a mere means and instrument for securing their supremacy as a faction, while he was dreaming of it as an ideal kingdom of universal justice in which the very spirit of faction must die¹. 'He became a theoretical politician, an ardent and impassioned doctrinaire, an inspired prophet, standing outside existing factions and clinging tenaciously to the dream which he had formed of a future and better state of things, destined by the Providence of God to supersede factions and restore the divine order of the world'².

Dante's first refuge was with 'the great Lombard,' ^{His first refuge—'the great Lombard'} who is identified with Bartolommeo della Scala of Verona, who died in 1304. There he saw Can Grande, a boy of nine, to whom afterwards he dedicated the *Paradiso*³. His next resting-place was probably Bologna, where he cannot have remained longer than 1306, in which year all Florentine exiles and Ghibellines were expelled from the city. There is said to exist documentary evidence that in August

¹ In *Par* vi 100-102 the Emperor Justinian denounces the Guelphs for opposing the Eagle, the public standard, and is equally indignant with the Ghibellines for making it the standard of a faction.

² J. Addington Symonds *The Study of Dante*, p. 63.

³ *Par* xvii 70-93. See pp. lviii, 29-32.

of this year he was in Padua, and in October in Lunigiana as the guest of one of the Malaspina family.¹ For four or five years after this, Dante disappears entirely: the Casentino, Forlì, Lunigiana again are suggested, but it is pure guesswork. It is in this period that the visit to Paris referred to by Villani is generally supposed to have taken place, and if so, it would account for the absence of every trace of him in Italy. He was recalled by the advent in Italy of the Emperor Henry VII in September 1310.

*The De
Monarchia*

In his Latin treatise, *De Monarchia*, Dante discusses the standing problem of the relations of Church and Empire. The date of it is unknown, and in the absence of definite information we may regard it as written in view of Henry's advent. It is, as one says, 'perhaps the most purely ideal of political works ever written'. Dante took the Church and the Empire for granted as the necessary framework of society, without which, indeed, he could not conceive its existence, and the *De Monarchia* is an attempt to lay down the limits of their respective jurisdictions. 'It is not the work of a statesman, but of a philosophical thinker, steeped in the abstractions of the school, and not constructing his system from given conditions, but basing it on dogmatic hypotheses, and explaining it from general conceptions'. Dante does not treat of the State, but of the ideal of the universal republic. With scholastic method he develops three principles: that the universal monarchy—that is to say, the empire—is

¹ *Purg.* viii. 118-130

necessary to the wellbeing of human society; that the monarchical power—the one indivisible imperium—legally belongs to the Roman people, and through them to the emperor; lastly, that the authority of the emperor is derived immediately from God, and not, according to the opinion of the priests, from the pope, the Vicar of Christ or God¹ It follows that Church and Empire have distinct and separate functions and jurisdictions. ‘Therefore man had need of two guides for his life, as he had a twofold end in life, whereof one is the Supreme Pontiff, to lead mankind to eternal life, according to the things revealed to us; and the other is the Emperor, to guide mankind to happiness in this world, in accordance with the teaching of philosophy’² In ‘the white star’ of Jupiter, the Heaven of Righteous Rulers, Dante works out this conception of universal monarchy on a wider scale than is possible on ‘this little plot of earth.’ The just kings of every age and land in the form of starry lights spell out, letter by letter, the opening words of the Book of Wisdom: *Diligite justitiam qui judicatis terram*, each adding his contribution to the celestial empire of universal righteousness. Then on the final M, the initial of Monarchia, more than a thousand settle and form themselves into the head and neck of the glowing imperial eagle.³ It is the apotheosis of the Empire of which he had dreamed on earth. To an idealist like this, Henry VII. of Luxemburg may well have seemed the heaven-ordained fulfiller of the

Apotheosis of
the Empire

Henry VII. of
Luxemburg

¹ Gregorovius, *Rome in the Middle Ages*, vi 20 (English Translation).

² *De Monarchia*, iii. 16 See pp 5, 6

³ *Par.* xviii 70 114

dream. For he too was an idealist, the best knight in Europe, a lover of righteousness and peace, his imagination touched to chivalry by the ancient glories of the Empire, and dreaming that, once crowned at Rome, the factions and wars of Italy would vanish as by enchantment in universal love and brotherhood. In the same generous delusion Dante welcomed him with a passion of religious joy which to our ears sounds, to say the least, irreverent. In his Letter to Henry, 'by divine providence King of the Romans, always august,' he says: 'In truth, I, who write as much for myself as for others, saw you most gracious, as beseems imperial majesty, and heard you most clement, when my hands touched your feet and my lips paid their debt. Then my spirit gloried in you, and silently I said within myself "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!"'¹ In another Letter he summons all Italy to receive the new Emperor as the lord and owner of the world. 'I exhort you not only to rise up to meet him, but also to do reverence to his presence. Ye who drink of his streams and navigate his seas, ye who tread the sands of the shores and the summits of the Alps that are his, ye who rejoice in any public thing whatsoever, and possess private goods not otherwise than by the bonds of his law; do not, as if ignorant, deceive yourselves as though ye dreamt in your hearts and said

¹ Letter vii. 2. The references to the Letters are according to the Oxford edition of Dante's Works by Dr. Moore, and the translations are generally those of Mr. Latham—*Dante's Eleven Letters*. From this quotation it appears that Dante was present and rendered homage when Henry was crowned with the iron crown at Milan in 1311.

"We have no lord." For his garden and lake is whatever the heavens encompass round about, since "The sea is God's and he made it, and His hands formed the dry land."¹ The response of Florence to this summons was the repair and heightening of her walls in defiance of the Emperor, whereupon Dante wrote a violent letter to 'the most infamous Florentines within the walls,' warning them that all their defences will be powerless to save them from the imperial vengeance. 'In what will it profit you to have surrounded yourselves with ramparts and battlements, when the eagle, terrible in a field of gold, swoops down on you,—the eagle who, now sailing over the Pyrenees, now over the Caucasus, now over Atlas, the more strengthened by the opposition of the host of heaven, of old looked down upon the vast seas as no hindrance to his flight?'² To the Emperor himself he did not hesitate to address a letter of indignant remonstrance for wasting time at the siege of Cremona when he should be reducing Florence, lopping branches when he should be killing the root 'Do you not know, perchance, O most excellent of princes! (nor can you see from the height of such majesty) where this stinking fox lies safe from the hunters? Forsooth the caitiff drinks neither in the waters of the precipitous Po, nor in those of your Tiber, but the streams of the Arno his jaws thus poison, and Florence (do you perchance know it not?) is this dire evil called. This is the viper that darts at the bowels of its mother, this is the sick sheep that contaminates

¹ Letter v 7² Letter vi 3

the flock of its master by contact. . . Up then, thou noble child of Jesse, take unto thyself courage from the eyes of the Lord God of Sabaoth, in whose presence thou art to act; and overthrow this Goliath with the sling of thy wisdom and the stone of thy strength, for at his fall night and the shadow of fear will cover the camp of the Philistines, the Philistines will flee, and Israel will be set at liberty. Then our heritage, deprived of which we weep without ceasing, will be restored to us in its entirety. And as now, while exiles in Babylon, we lament in remembering holy Jerusalem, so then, as citizens, and breathing in peace, with gladness shall we call to mind the miseries of turmoil.¹ But it was not to be. In little more than two years Henry lay dead at Buonconvento, and Dante's political hopes were buried in his tomb. Even had he lived, success was impossible, as Prof. Villari points out, the national idea and spirit were heaving in men's minds, and it was precisely the Emperor's claim to be lord of all men and things which roused this national instinct to opposition.²

Death of
Henry, 1313

Dante's Wishes
renewed

How Dante took the wreck of his hopes we have no means of knowing. He broke into no cry of lamentation or despair. In the *Paradiso*, Beatrice points out to him in the snow-white Rose of the redeemed 'the great seat' of 'the lofty Henry who came to straighten Italy ere she was ready for it'; that is the only reference to the fading of his hopes.³

¹ Letter vii 7, 8

² *The Two First Centuries of Florentine History*, chap. x § ix

³ *Par.* xxx 133-144. In 1300, the ideal date of the poem, the seat, of course, was vacant, but Henry's crown is set above it in anticipation of his advent. In reality the passage was written after his death.

Florence could not forgive the violence of his denunciations and threats, in a decree of September 2, 1311, he is one of a number of exiles excluded from amnesty, and never to be allowed to return to the city. After Henry's death in 1313, Dante disappears almost entirely from public view. In the *Purgatorio* he himself speaks of a visit to Lucca, and it is supposed that this took place in 1314, when that city was in the hands of the Ghibelline leader Uguccione della Faggiuola.¹ In November of the following year another sentence was launched against him, his sons for some reason being included in it. Their doom as Ghibellines and rebels is, if captured, 'to be taken to the place of justice, and there to have their heads struck from their shoulders, so that they die outright. In 1316 an amnesty was offered to the exiles Dante, indeed, was excluded, but private information seems to have been conveyed to him by friends in the city that the pardon might be extended to him if he would submit to the conditions—the payment of a fine and the performance of a public penance in the Baptistery of St. John. In the well-known *Letter to a Florentine Friend*, Dante indignantly refused to return on such unjust and shameful terms 'Is this then the glorious recall wherewith Dante Alighieri is summoned back to his country after an exile patiently endured for almost fifteen years? Did his innocence, manifest to whomsoever it may be, deserve this—this, the sweat and increasing toil of study? Far be the rash humility of a heart of earth from a man familiar with philosophy,

Lucca (1314?)

His Refusal of Pardon, 1316

¹ *Purg.* xxiv 34 48

that like a prisoner he may suffer himself to be offered up after the manner of a certain Ciolo and other criminals. Far be it from a man who preaches justice after having patiently endured injury to pay his money to those inflicting it, as though they were his benefactors. This is not the way to return to my country, O my Father. If another shall be found by you, or by others, that does not derogate from the fame and honour of Dante, that will I take with no lagging steps. But if Florence is entered by no such path, then never will I enter Florence. What? Can I not look upon the face of the sun and the stars everywhere? Can I not meditate anywhere under the heavens upon most sweet truths, unless I first render myself inglorious, nay ignominious, to the people and state of Florence? Nor indeed will bread be lacking.¹

His last
refuge—
Ravenna
(1316 ?)

After a short visit which he is believed to have paid to the Court of Can Grande of Verona, perhaps in 1316, Dante betook himself to his last earthly refuge. Guido Novello da Polenta, lord of Ravenna, and nephew of Francesca da Rimini, invited him to become his guest, and there among the ruins and mosaics of the old imperial city, and near 'the pine wood on the shore of Chiassi,'² he spent his closing years—probably, one is glad to think, in more comfort than he had known during the greater part of his long exile. His host honoured him for his genius. His sons Pietro and Jacopo and his daughter Beatrice

¹ *Letter ix* 3, 4. The Ciolo is supposed to be a member of the Abati family—the only one of his house whose name was expressly excepted from the decree against the exiles, dated September 2, 1311, referred to above.

² *Purg.* xxviii. 20

were with him, the last a nun in the convent of Santo Stefano dell' Uliva. A number of pupils gathered round him, so that 'he was making an independent living in the capacity of professor or reader of Vernacular Rhetoric at the Studio, or, as we should now say, University of Ravenna.'¹ The exchange of playful Eclogues between him and Giovanni del Virgilio, *The Eclogues* a professor of Bologna, under the pastoral names of Tityrus and Mopsus, shows that his misfortunes had not entirely crushed Dante's spirits. he was able still to see the sun From references in the Eclogues it is inferred that the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* were already finished, and that Dante was still engaged on the *Paradiso* In 1321, Guido da Polenta sent him on an embassy to Venice in connection with a dispute which had arisen between the two cities; and while returning through the marshes he caught fever and died on September 14, in the fifty-sixth *His Death,* year of his age. So passed into the other world the *Sep. 14, 1321* spirit that had so long been a pilgrim in it even upon earth, and doubtless then were fulfilled to the weary exile the words he himself had written, probably when his hope of ever entering the earthly city had grown dim 'And as to him who comes from a long journey, before he enters into the gate of his city, the citizens thereof go forth to meet him, so to meet the noble soul go forth those citizens of the Eternal Life. And this they do because of her good works

¹ Wicksteed and Gardner's *Dante and Giovanni del Virgilio—Prolegomena*, p. 84 It is suggested that the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* was 'a kind of poetical text book for the use of Dante's students at Ravenna, perhaps actually the substance of his course of lectures at the University' (p. 88) Scartazzini makes the same suggestion, and thinks the *Convito* was similarly used as a text-book

and contemplations.¹ It is the welcome Beatrice had already given him as he stood on the threshold of Paradise.

‘And thou shalt be with me for evermore

A citizen of that Rome where Christ is Roman ’²

Such was the life of Dante Alighieri, a man broken with every variety of sorrow, disappointment, and worldly failure, but never losing the lordship and freedom of his own soul. ‘He had suffered,’ says Karl Federn, ‘all ill chance that could fall to the lot of man. He loved and had lost his beloved one, his family life was unhappy, he was a statesman, and as such was unsuccessful, he saw his party defeated and driven from the land, and when the Emperor, from whom he had expected the redemption of Italy and his own reinstatement, entered Italy with a victorious army, he saw him die. He had been full of the noblest intentions, yet men not only gave him no thanks, but had hunted him out, had branded his name with foul crimes and condemned him to death. He had lost his whole fortune; one of the proudest of men, he was forced continually to humble himself and to live on foreign alms, one of the greatest poets of all times, he saw himself neither understood nor honoured. His whole life was devoted to his native city, he clung to it with all his heart, and he passed twenty-two years longing in vain to return to it. A devout Catholic, full of reverence for his Church, he saw it degraded, governed by “New Pharisees,” and at last fallen and dishonoured. Italy,

¹ *Conv* iv 28

² *Purg* xxxii 101-102

whose unity was dear to him, he saw torn by the hatred of parties and cruelly devastated by war. A sea of wrong had passed over him, he saw a sea of wrong raging over the world in which he lived; wherever he turned his eyes everything was such as to drive him to despair, but he despaired not. He believed, and in spite of all, recognized the high harmony of the world. He had found the path for his soul, the work for his mind, by which he got rid of the weight which crushed him, and at the same time took his proud revenge on the men who had so maltreated him. In "eternal letters of fire" he wrote his terrible judgment "as lightning writes its cipher on the rocks" to be read by all posterity, that men might one day fix the balance between this one man on the one side and mankind on the other.¹ Nevertheless he is not to be pitied, it was this furnace of suffering which burnt away the dross and left the gold. Had he never been driven into exile and 'held heartbreak at bay,' the great poem which 'made him lean for many a year'² would have remained unwritten. Entangled and lost in the 'dark and savage wood,' the paltry ambitions, quarrels, and vices of his city, he might never have become a pilgrim of the invisible. The spirit of faction never did a nobler service to the world than when Florence, that 'mother of little

¹ *Dante and his Time*, pp 267-268. The 'twenty two years' is a slip for twenty. The first sentence of banishment is dated January 27, 1304, and the date of Dante's death is September 14, 1321. It is to be remembered that the Florentine year began on March 25, and therefore in the foregoing mode of writing the year (1304) the upper figure represents the old method of reckoning, and the lower the modern.

² *Par.* xxv 13

love,' disowned her son and flung him out upon the universal hopes and fears, sins, sorrows, and aspirations of mankind, to steer his course by nothing lower than the steadfast stars. It was not Brunetto Latini, 'dear and good and fatherly,' but his long exile, cruel and relentless, that taught Dante 'in the world from hour to hour how man makes himself eternal.'¹

The *Com-
media*

How it was possible in the midst of this distracted, homeless, wandering life to gather the stores of encyclopædic knowledge and to shape them into the ordered unity and symbolism of the *Commedia*, must remain a mystery and a miracle. All interpretation of the poem must start from the Epistle in which Dante dedicates the *Paradiso* to his former host, Can Grande of Verona, and gives his own commentary on part of the first Canto.² The title of the whole poem, he says, is—'The Comedy of Dante Alighieri, a Florentine by birth, not by character'³

Meaning of
the Title

He explains why it is called a Comedy. Tragedy is in its beginning 'admirable and quiet,' and in its ending 'foul and horrible', whereas Comedy, reversing this, begins with some asperity and ends

¹ *Inf* xv 82 85

² This statement is true whether the Letter is authentic or not. Its genuineness is questioned chiefly on the grounds of its absence from old MSS, and the silence of Boccaccio and other early commentators. If authentic—and it is far from being proved that it is not—it is pathetic to find Dante abruptly ending the exposition because of poverty. 'In particular I will not expound it at present, for poverty presseth so hard upon me that I must needs abandon these and other matters useful for the public good. But I hope of your magnificence that other means may be given me of continuing with a useful exposition' (par 32)

³ 'The title *Divina Commedia* is subsequent to Dante, it appears in some of the oldest MSS and in Boccaccio's "Vita di Dante"' (Toynbee)

prosperously. There is also a difference in the manner of speech, Tragedy using a style 'lofty and sublime,' while that of Comedy is 'weak and humble.' 'From this it is evident why the present work is called a comedy. For if we consider the theme, in its beginning it is horrible and foul, because it is Hell; in its ending, fortunate, desirable, and joyful, because it is Paradise, and if we consider the style of language, the style is careless and humble, because it is the vulgar tongue, in which even housewives hold converse'¹ He warns us that the meaning is not simple but manifold 'For the clearness, therefore, of what I shall say, it must be understood that the meaning of this work is not simple, but rather can be said to be of many significations (*polysemum*), that is, of several meanings; for there is one meaning that is derived from the letter, and another that is derived from the things signified by the letter The first is called *literal*, but the second *allegorical* or *mystical* That this method of expounding may be more clearly set forth, we may consider it in these lines "When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a barbarous people, Judah was His sanctuary, and Israel His dominion." For if we consider the *letter* alone, the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt in the time of Moses is signified; if the *allegory*, our redemption accomplished in Christ is signified; if the *moral meaning*, the conversion of the soul from the sorrow and misery of sin to a state of grace is signified, if the

The Fourfold
Sense

¹ *Letter* x 10 In *De Vulg Eloq* (ii 4) he gives a very different account of Tragedy and Comedy

anagogical, the departure of the sanctified soul from the bondage of this corruption to the liberty of eternal glory is signified. And although these mystical meanings are called by various names, they can in general all be said to be allegorical, since they differ from the literal or historic, for the word *Allegoria* is derived from the Greek ἀλλοῖος, which in Latin is *alienum* or *diversum*.¹ At first sight this seems to make confusion worse confounded: how is a plain man to make his way through this labyrinth of manifold senses? And doubtless 'the art of misunderstanding Dante' is easy enough. Nevertheless the task of interpretation is not so difficult as it looks. These manifold senses are reducible to two with which every mind is familiar—the *literal* and the *moral and spiritual*. The moral and spiritual significance of the *Commedia* is not really obscure or uncertain, so far at least as its broad outlines are concerned. However Dante may conceal his meaning 'under the veil of the mysterious verses' and the embarrassing riches of detail, the meaning when discovered is found to be the plain broad highway of common morality and religion. To this highway it is the duty of an expositor to keep, refusing resolutely to be tempted too far down any of the picturesque and interesting lanes and by-paths, which almost invariably end in some *cul-de-sac* of private interpretation. In doing so, he will best fulfil the plain practical purpose which Dante, as the poet of Righteousness,² ex-

Dante's Final
Aim

¹ Letter x 7. See *Conv* II 1, where he expounds the same four senses at greater length. Also Aquinas, *Summa* I q 1 a 10.

² *De Vulg Elog* II 2.

pressly professes: 'The subject of the whole work, taken according to the letter alone, is simply a consideration of the state of souls after death, for from and around this the action of the whole work turneth. But if the work is considered according to its allegorical meaning, the subject is man, liable to the reward or punishment of Justice, according as through the freedom of the will he is deserving or undeserving. Omitting all subtle investigation, it can be briefly stated that the aim of the whole and of the part is to remove those living in this life from a state of misery, and to guide them to a state of happiness' ¹

¹ *Letter x* 8, 15 In his *Dante Dictionary*, Toynbee says 'In the light of the fivefold interpretation of the *Commedia* indicated in his Letter to Can Grande (Epis x 7), Dante, as he appears in the poem, represents in the literal sense the Florentine Dante Alighieri, in the allegorical, Man on his earthly pilgrimage, in the moral, Man turning from vice to virtue, in the religious, the Sinner turning to God, in the anagogical, the Soul passing from a state of sin to that of glory'

THE MORAL AND PHYSICAL STRUCTURE OF THE INFERNO

DANTE's classification of sins is discussed in Chapter XI, but, even at the risk of some repetition, it is thought advisable to gather together here, in one short general statement, the various details of the structure of the Inferno which are scattered throughout the following exposition. If these are carefully compared with the accompanying diagram and mastered at the outset, the reader will find his understanding of the interpretation greatly facilitated.

In material form, the Inferno is a vast underground cavern, which lies directly beneath Jerusalem and Calvary, and pierces to the exact centre of the earth. Originally, according to Dante's conception, the Southern hemisphere consisted of land, and the Northern of water, but the fall of Lucifer produced a great convulsion and inversion of this arrangement. To avoid contact with so great a sinner, the land fled to the Northern hemisphere, the waters of which rushed into the vacant place. Further, the weight of his sin drove Satan with such violence that he tore his way to the very centre of gravity, where he lies embedded in ice and rocks. The bowels of the earth, recoiling from him in horror, flung themselves up into the great Mountain of Purgatory, the only land in the Southern Ocean, and the exact antipodes of Jerusalem and Mount Calvary. The vast subterranean hollow thus formed was utilised as the eternal prison of the finally impenitent. In shape, it is an inverted cone, its base probably co-extensive with the land surface of the Northern hemisphere, and its apex at the centre. Around the interior of this cone run ten concentric Terraces or Circles, narrowing and deepening, like an amphitheatre, to the point where Lucifer lies. It is on these Terraces the various sins are punished, being arranged higher or lower, wider or narrower, according to the degree of their guilt.

Although there are ten of these Circles, the first is not reckoned of the number, since it forms a mere vestibule for neutral and cowardly souls, whom Dante regards as unworthy of a place even in Hell. Circle I also lies outside the general ethical scheme, being the mere Limbo of Virtuous Heathen and Unbaptized Infants. The sins of the remaining Circles are divided into two great classes. *Incontinence*, punished in upper, and *Malice*, in nether Hell.

I SINS OF INCONTINENCE set in the higher Circles because they are sins of frailty—mere non-control of various appetites and faculties normal to human nature—

Circle II The Sensual

Circle III The Gluttonous.

Circle IV The Avaricious—Misers and Prodigals

Circle V The Wrathful and Sullen

Circle VI Heretics. This forms a transition Circle between upper and nether Hell. In relation to the Circles above, Heresy may be regarded as the last and most spiritual of the sins of Incontinence, being non control of the intellectual powers. In addition, however, it is the beginning of

GUARDIANS OF CIRCLES

MODE OF PUNISHMENT

SS OF SINNERS

WASPS & HORNETS

WIND

RAIN

ROLLING OF WEIGHTS

MIRE OF STYX

TOMBS OF FIRE

MINOS

CERBERUS

PLUTUS

PHLEGYAS

THE FURIES

CITY OF DIS

MINOTAUR OF CRETE
(HENCE DOWNWARD - SINS OF MALICE)

VII THE VIOLENT

CENTAURS

HARPIES

RIVER OF BLOOD

FOREST OF SUICIDES

RAIN OF FIRE

GERYON
(MALEBOLGE)

VIII THE FRAUDULENT

DEMONS

FILTH

FIRE ON THE FEET

YEARS REVERSED

PITCH

GOWNS OF LEAD

SERPENTS

TONGUES OF FIRE

CLOVEN WITH SWORD

VARIOUS DISEASES

X FALSIFIERS

GIANTS
(GOCYTUS)

IX TRAITORS

ICE

ICE

ICE

ICE

ICE

LUCIFER

SS OF
INNERS
TE-HEL

SS UP
INNERS

INTE-HELL OF NEUTRALS
I LIMBO OF UNBAPTIZED
II SENSUAL
III GLUTTONS
IV MISERS & PRODIGALS
V ANGRY & SULLEN
VI HERETICS

LINE OF INCARCERATION

GUARDIANS
OF CIRCLES

MODE OF
PUNISHMENT
WASPS & HORNETS

MINOTAUR OF CRETE

(HENCE DOWNWARD - SINS OF MALICE)

VII THE VIOLENT

I AGAINST NEIGHBOURS
II AGAINST THEMSELVES
III AGAINST GOD NATURE ART

GERYON
(MALEBOLGE)

VIII THE FRAUDULENT

I. BETRAYERS OF WOMEN	DEMONS
II. FLATTERERS	FILTH
III. SIMONIACS	FIRE ON THE FEET
IV. DIVINEPS	HEADS REVERSED
V. RABBITORS	PITCH
VI. HYPOCRITES	GOWNING OF LEAD
VII. THIEVES	SERPENTS
VIII. EVIL ADVISERS	TONGUES OF FIRE
IX. SCHISMATICS	CLOVEN WITH SWORD
X. FALSIFIERS	VARIOUS DISEASES

GIANTS
(GOCYTUS)

IX. TRAITORS

CANA TO KIN ICE
 HANTENORA TO COUNTRY ICE
 TOLUMFA TO FRIENDS & RELATIVES ICE
 GIUDECCA TO EMPLOYERS ICE

LUCIFER

STRUCTURE OF THE INFERNO lxiii

the second great division of Hell Heretics are punished in the City of Dis or Satan, and it is by a great landship in the centre of the city that the descent to nether Hell is made In other words, the Circles beneath are, so to speak, the underground dungeons of the city, in which its vilest criminals are tortured

II SINS OF MALICE subdivided into two classes—*Violence* and *Fraud* —

Circle VII The Violent,

- I Against Neighbours ,
- II Against Themselves ,
- III Against God, Nature, and Art

Fraud is subdivided into *Fraud simple* and *Treachery*, which are punished in the two lowest Circles —

Circle VIII *Fraud simple* in ten forms, which are distributed in ten concentric Moats The whole Circle is called *Malebolge*, which means Evil pouches, and each class of the Fraudulent occupies a separate *Bolgia* or Pouch in the following order —

Bolgia I Betrayers of Women—Pandors and Seducers

- II Flatterers
- III Simoniacs
- IV Diviners
- V Barrators
- VI Hypocrites
- VII Thieves
- VIII Evil Counsellors
- IX Schismatics
- X Falsifiers

Circle IX *Treachery*—that is, Fraud against some special trust reposed in us by our fellowmen The whole Circle consists of a lake of ice named *Cocytus*, and is divided into four concentric Rings in which Traitors are frozen at varying depths, according to the degree and quality of their treachery —

- I Traitors to Kindred—punished in *Caina*, so called from Cain, the first fratricide
- II Traitors to Country—in the Second Ring, *Antenora*, which receives its name from Antenor, who betrayed Troy
- III Traitors to Friends and Guests—set in *Tolomea*, named from Ptolomeus, captain of Jericho, who treacherously slew his guests, Simon the Maccabee and his two sons
- IV Traitors to Lords and Benefactors This brings us to 'the last post' of Hell, which receives its title of *Giudecca* from Judas, who betrayed his Lord In the exact centre of the lake of ice is frozen Lucifer, with the three arch traitors, Judas, Brutus, and Cassius, in his three mouths

The various orders of sin — Incontinence, Violence, Fraud, and Treachery—are separated by three great chasms, in token of their deepening heinousness and guilt In their pilgrimage through the Inferno, Dante and Virgil move uniformly to the left—partly because this is the direction appropriate to the world of the lost, and partly to indicate the increasing departure from virtue as they descend to the lower Circles When they reach the centre of gravity, they turn a somersault, and find themselves in a narrow passage, which leads them out to the shore of Mount Purgatory in the great ocean of the Southern hemisphere

‘ The great Florentine, who wove his web
And thrust it into hell, and drew it forth
Immortal, having burned all that could burn,
And leaving only what shall still be found
Untouched nor with the smell of fire upon it,
Under the final ashes of this world ’

SYDNEY DOBELL's *Balder*

CHAPTER I

THE SAVAGE WOOD AND THE THREE WILD BEASTS

THE opening line of the *Commedia* gives us the age at which, in poetic fiction, Dante began his great pilgrimage through the Invisible

CANTO I

—
Ideal date of
Poem

In the middle of the pathway of our life

In the *Convito* he compares man's life to an arch, the highest point of which 'in perfect natures' is the thirty-fifth year. Since Dante was born in 1265, this brings us to the year 1300, from the standpoint of which it is generally agreed the poem was written. When later historical events are referred to, they are put in the form of prophecies. We do not know with certainty what Dante's reason was for making the year 1300 the ideal date on which the entire action of the poem hinges. It may have been partly because, being the top of the arch, it is the point from which his life began to decline towards another world, but perhaps the simplest and most natural reason is that in this year he himself felt that he had passed through a great moral and spiritual crisis which altered the whole outlook and horizon of his life. If there is any truth in the conjecture that he was in Rome during the Easter week of 1300, it is

2 THE SAVAGE WOOD AND

CANTO I possible that the visit had more than we know to do with this change, which was nothing short of the

The Jubilee

poet's conversion It is a year famous in the Roman Catholic Church for the institution of the Jubilee. An impression spread mysteriously throughout Italy and far beyond that all who visited the tombs of the Apostles St Peter and St Paul during the first year of the new century would receive full absolution of their sins Multitudes thronged to the Holy City, and Pope Boniface VIII., falling in with the universal expectation, proclaimed the first Jubilee, granting 'a most full pardon of all sins' to all who made the pilgrimage 'It can scarcely be doubted,' says Gregorovius, 'that Dante beheld the city in these days, and that a ray from them fell on his immortal poem, which begins with Easter week of 1300.'¹ There are several passages in the *Commedia* which certainly seem to point to a visit to Rome during the Jubilee pilgrimages, and such a visit may have produced in Dante's soul as great a spiritual crisis as it did in Luther's at a later date At all events, the spiritual idea is obvious Dante's pilgrimage through the Invisible corresponds ideally to our Lord's Death, Descent into Hell, Resurrection and Ascension. On the evening of Good Friday he entered the Inferno; on the morning of Easter Sunday he rose with Christ into newness of life, and, probably on the following Wednesday, he ascended to the Heavenly

¹ *Rome in the Middle Ages*, book x chap vi Villani, who was present, gives an account of the Jubilee in his *Chronicle*, book viii 36 'It was the most marvellous thing that was ever seen, for throughout the year, without break, there were in Rome, besides the inhabitants of the city, 200,000 pilgrims, not counting those who were coming and going on their journeys'

THE THREE WILD BEASTS 8

Paradise. In the new life of repentance on which he had entered, the soul dies, rises, and ascends with Christ. The year 1300 may have been chosen partly to carry out this parallelism, for in his curious mystical fashion he says in the *Convito* that 'our Saviour Christ, whose nature was perfect, chose to die in the thirty-fourth year of His age, because it did not befit Divinity to decline'¹

CANTO I
—

On the morning, then, of this Good Friday in the very centre of his life, Dante tells us that, after a night of desperate fear, he came to himself in a dark and savage wood, where the way was lost. How he came to be there he did not know—he must have wandered from the true path in his sleep, the sinful slumber of the soul. What, then, does this savage wood symbolize, the very memory of which is as the bitterness of death? Probably the general meaning is given in a passage of the *Convito* (iv 24), where Dante says that 'the adolescent who enters *the wood of error of this life* could not keep the good road were he not shown it by his elders'. But this is too general—in the *Commedia* Dante has usually something much more definite before his mind. Among commentators three main lines of interpretation

The dark and
savage wood.

¹ *Conv.* iv 23, 24. Dante divides human life into four parts: *Adolescence*, lasting up to the twenty-fifth year; *Youth*, from twenty-five to forty-five, having the thirty-fifth year as the centre of the arch; *Old Age*, from forty-five to seventy; and *Senility*, about ten years longer, 'a little more or a little less'. In the *Summa* (in Q. xlv. A. 9), Aquinas says Christ chose to die in the flower of His age for three reasons: 1, The more to commend His love to us because He gave His life for us at its prime; 2, Because it was not fitting that there should appear any diminution of His natural powers; and 3, That dying and rising again in His youthful prime, He should foreshadow the quality of the bodies of those who should afterwards rise in Him.

CANTO I

1. Political
interpreta-
tion.

have been followed—the political, the moral, and the philosophical. According to the first, the wood represents the dark and savage condition of Italy in Dante's day in both Church and State. From a multitude of passages in the poem it is quite certain that this formed one element in his despondency. Happily, it is almost impossible for us to form any conception of the state of Florence and other Italian cities political and family feuds almost incessantly drenching the streets with blood, and each party as it gained the mastery banishing its enemies and confiscating their property. The *Commedia* overflows with denunciations of these feuds, and of both Pope and Emperor for their neglect of duty which rendered possible this chronic state of civil war. Boniface VIII in particular roused Dante's sternest indignation. he calls him 'the prince of the new Pharisees,' and consigns him in anticipation to the Moat of the Simoniacs. In Paradise all heaven flushes with shame and anger as St Peter describes 'the sewer of blood and stench' which this usurper of his place had made of his 'cemetery,' the Vatican.¹ If we bear all this in mind, we shall find nothing improbable in the interpretation which sees in this dark, savage, and stubborn wood the tangled and desperate political condition of Italy in both Church and State. The corruptions of the Papal Court, the simony of the Pope and his haughty claim of temporal power, the absenteeism of the Emperor, the factions of Florence, his own banishment by his fellow-citizens, and the consequent ruin of his

¹ *Par* xxvii 22-30.

earthly fortunes, might well make Dante seem to himself as a man entangled and lost in a dark forest, 'savage, rough, and stern.'

Further, this interpretation is confirmed when we turn to the Earthly Paradise on the top of Mount Purgatory. There Dante finds himself in another forest which is undoubtedly meant to be understood as the counterpart of this one. It is not dark and savage, but fair with sunlight filtering through 'the living green,' and vocal with the songs of birds as he remembered hearing them sing to a murmurous accompaniment of leaves in the pine-forests of Chiassi by the Adriatic shore. A fair lady is gathering flowers and singing in her joy, so safe is it from every danger, and Virgil, his guide, tells him there is no fear of his being lost in its depths—he has power and freedom to wander wheresoever he will: 'take thine own pleasure for thy guide henceforth.'¹ The contrast between the two is obvious and intentional, for when we turn to the *De Monarchia* we find that this sunlit wood, glad with birds and flowers, represents the just and settled order of human life here on earth—the Earthly Paradise of good government. 'Two ends, therefore, have been laid down by the ineffable providence of God for man to aim at. the blessedness of this life, which consists in the exercise of his natural powers, and which is prefigured in the Earthly Paradise; and next, the blessedness of the life eternal, which consists in the fruition of the sight of God's countenance, and to which man by his own natural powers cannot

¹ *Purg* xxvii 131.

6 THE SAVAGE WOOD AND

CANTO I — rise, if he be not aided by the divine light; and this blessedness is understood by the Heavenly Paradise. . . . Therefore man had need of two guides for his life, as he had a twofold end in life, whereof one is the Supreme Pontiff, to lead mankind to eternal life, according to the things revealed to us, and the other is the Emperor, to guide mankind to happiness in this world, in accordance with the teaching of philosophy.¹ In Dante's view, both guides had neglected their appointed task. The Emperor, by his absence from Italy, had allowed 'the garden of the empire to be waste', while the Pope, in his anxiety not 'to let Cæsar sit upon the saddle,' had disobeyed the plain command of God.² The natural consequence was a political and ecclesiastical wilderness which might well be compared to a dark and savage forest, and set in contrast with the wood of the Earthly Paradise, bright with sunlight and with flowers.

2. Moral interpretation

The second interpretation referred to regards this dark wood as symbolic of the demoralization of Dante's own personal life, and there can be little doubt that this is its primary meaning. Whatever more the poem may be—and it is much more—it is in the first instance the story of the poet's own moral and spiritual conversion. The *Purgatorio* has well been called 'The Confessions of Dante Alighieri.' The Angel at the Gate of St. Peter touches his brow with his sword, and the seven deadly sins, hitherto concealed, instantly become visible, and are purged away one by one as he climbs from Terrace to Terrace. When at last he stands on the summit of the

¹ *De Monarchia*, iii. 13.

² *Purg.* vi. 88-105.

THE THREE WILD BEASTS 7

Mount, Beatrice sternly and without pity for his tears drives home upon his conscience the conviction of some great root-sin from which all the rest grew —unfaithfulness to herself

CANTO I
—

‘ As soon as ever of my second age¹
I was upon the threshold, and changed life,
Himself from me he took and gave to others
When from the flesh to spirit I ascended,
And beauty and virtue were in me increased,
I was to him less dear and less delightful,
And into ways untrue he turned his steps,
Pursuing the false images of good,
That never any promises fulfil,
Nor prayer for inspiration me availed,
By means of which in dreams and otherwise
I called him back, so little did he heed them
So low he fell that all appliances
For his salvation were already short,
Save showing him the people of perdition ’²

What precisely this unfaithfulness to Beatrice was has been subject of endless dispute. Some writers will have it that it was nothing worse than the sin of devoting himself to the study of Philosophy instead of Theology. But, putting aside meantime the question whether Dante regarded this as a sin at all, his own language throughout the poem is strangely misleading if it does not mean a great deal more. For instance, he expressly acknowledges the sin of Pride.³ On the Terrace of the Gluttons on the

¹ See note on p. 3, on the four ages of human life. The second, Youth, begins at twenty-five, and Beatrice died in her twenty-fourth year, i. e. on the threshold of her ‘second age.’

² *Purg.* xxx 124-138

³ *Purg.* xiii 133-138

8 THE SAVAGE WOOD AND

CANTO I Mount of Purification, one of the souls, Buonagiunta of Lucca, murmurs in a curious way the name of a certain Gentucca, a lady of that city, and it is difficult to avoid receiving the impression of some love-intrigue, which Dante thus confesses¹ On the same Terrace he meets his old friend Forese Donati, and says to him

‘If thou bring back to mind
What thou with me hast been and I with thee,
The present memory will be grievous still’²

Surely, if this means anything, it is a confession of some irregularity of moral life in which they were companions on earth. From the Terrace, we might infer that it was the sin of gluttony, but the reference may be to a bundle of abusive and scurrilous sonnets which passed between the two during a quarrel, and which assuredly, if genuine, are no credit to either³ Add to this the sad and dignified sonnet in which Guido Cavalcanti, whom he called ‘the first among his friends,’ reproaches him for the way of life into which he has fallen

‘I come to thee by daytime constantly,
But in thy thoughts too much of baseness find
Greatly it grieves me for thy gentle mind,
And for thy many virtues gone from thee
It was thy wont to shun much company,
Unto all sorry concourse ill inclined
And still thy speech of me, heartfelt and kind,
Had made me treasure up thy poetry

¹ *Purg* xxiv 34-48

² *Purg* xxiii 115-117

³ D G Rossetti's *Dante and his Circle*, 241-248

But now I dare not, for thine abject life,
 Make manifest that I approve thy rhymes;
 Nor come I in such sort that thou may'st know
 Ah! prythee read this sonnet many times
 So shall that evil one who bred this strife
 Be thrust from thy dishonoured soul and go '1

CANTO I

In face of such things as these, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this dark wood means something more than the study of Philosophy

Turning, then, to this third interpretation, we find ourselves entangled in difficulties. The idea that the unfaithfulness to herself with which Beatrice charges him is the study of Philosophy, is based on the words which she addresses to him in the closing Canto of the *Purgatorio* 3 Philosophical interpretation

'That thou may'st recognize,' she said, 'the school
 Which thou hast followed, and may'st see how far
 Its doctrine follows after my discourse,
 And may'st behold your path from the divine
 Distant as far as separated is
 From earth the heaven that highest hastens on '2

The 'school' is here understood as some school of Philosophy for which Dante had abandoned Beatrice or Theology, and the *Convito* is quoted in proof. After telling us how, in order to comfort himself for the loss of Beatrice, he read Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophæ* and Cicero's *De Amicitia*, he proceeds. 'And just as if a man should go about looking for silver, and apart from his purpose should find gold, . so I, who sought to console myself, found not only a remedy for my tears, but sayings of

¹ D G Rossetti's *Dante and his Circle*, 161

² *Purg* xxxlii 85 90

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CANTO I
— authors, and of sciences, and of books; considering which, I soon decided that Philosophy, who was the sovereign lady of these authors, these sciences, and these books, was the supreme thing. And I imagined her as a noble lady, and I could not imagine her as other than merciful, wherefore so willingly did my sense of Truth behold her that it could scarcely be diverted from her. And on account of this imagination I began to go where she in truth showed herself, that is, in the schools of the religious and the disputations of the philosophers, so that in a little while, perhaps thirty months, I began to be so deeply aware of her sweetness, that the love of her banished and destroyed every other thought.¹ This passage certainly proves that after the death of Beatrice Dante did turn for consolation to Philosophy, but it also proves with equal certainty that when he wrote the *Convito* he had no idea that in doing so he was committing a sin. On the contrary, he speaks of Philosophy in a way which sounds to our ears as the very hyperbole of praise. We do not know the date of the *Convito*, and of course it is quite possible that Dante in the interval between it and the *Commedia* may have swung to the opposite extreme. But it is entirely unlikely, from his general conception of the relations between Faith and Reason. With his great theological authority, St Thomas Aquinas, Dante did indeed draw a distinction between Faith and Reason, but certainly not such a distinction as would turn the exercise of Reason into a positive sin, demanding the agony of contrition which Beatrice

¹ *Conv.* ii 13.

wrings from him in the *Purgatorio*. On the contrary, Reason is consistently regarded as the light of God shining in the natural mind of man. True, for salvation it requires to be supplemented by the supernatural light of Faith; nevertheless, so far as it goes, it is right and good. The relation between the two is symbolized by Dante's two chief guides. Virgil is the natural Reason of man, but Beatrice, the symbol of the heavenly Wisdom which comes of Faith, does not disparage or condemn Virgil. On the contrary, it is she who seeks him out and gives him his commission to guide Dante to herself.

It seems much nearer the mark to say that Philosophy, so far from being the dark wood, is the sunlit hill which Dante attempted to climb.¹ Nothing is more unsatisfactory than the summary way in which this hill is usually dismissed by a quotation from the Psalms—'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills,' or a reference to 'the delectable mountains' of the *Pilgrim's Progress*. As unsatisfactory is it to say that it is simply the opposite of the tangled wood of moral and political error—the hill of virtue, truth, and good government. There is a passage in the *Purgatorio* which almost certainly ought to be read in connection with this mountain. When, in the Earthly Paradise on the top of Mount Purgatory, Dante sees Beatrice for the first time, she greets him with the words.

'Look at me well. I, even I, am Beatrice!
How didst thou deign to come unto the mountain?
Didst thou not know that here man is happy?'²

¹ *Inf.* l. 13 30.

² *Purg.* xxx. 73 75

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CANTO I The common interpretation is that the words—‘How didst thou deign to come unto the mountain?’ refer to the mountain on which they are now standing, namely, Mount Purgatory, and, in that case, the question is ironical. But this is far from natural, and cannot by any ingenuity be made to harmonize with the second question—‘Didst thou not know that *here* man is happy?’ But the questions fall into their proper relations if we suppose Beatrice to be speaking of two mountains and setting them in contrast. ‘Why didst thou deign to approach the other mountain? Didst thou not know that not there, but *here*, man is happy?’ The other mountain can only be that mentioned here at the beginning of his pilgrimage. It was just after his vain attempt to climb it that Beatrice herself interposed on his behalf by sending Virgil as his guide, and now that she meets him for the first time thereafter, she reverts to that mountain and asks why he had approached it at all in quest of happiness. If now we say that the mountain Dante first attempted to climb was Philosophy, it fits in sufficiently well with all the facts. He himself tells us he at first sought refuge in Philosophy. For a time he thought her sunlit heights sufficient, not knowing that he had a far loftier mountain to climb, the highest under heaven, and far beyond it again, through the ten spheres of Paradise to the Beatific Vision. But, low as that mountain of Philosophy was, Dante found it beyond his power to climb—the three wild beasts impeded his way even Philosophy is beyond the man who has not conquered the beast in himself.

A writer in the *Quarterly Review* (July 1896) supports this interpretation with singular ingenuity. For example, Dante tells us that, in attempting to climb this hill, 'the firm foot ever was the lower' (i. 30). The common interpretation is that the 'firm' or strong foot is the right, just as in *Inf.* xix 41 the 'weary' (*stanca*) hand means the left. When a man climbs a hill so that his right foot is always the lower, he must be rounding it towards the right hand, and it is supposed that Dante simply wishes to tell the direction in which he moved. The writer in the *Quarterly*, however, discards this view, and holds that in these words Dante describes, and means to describe, the very method of Science and Philosophy as distinguished from Faith. 'At the opening of the poem the mystic pilgrim is lost in a forest of perplexity, and when at length he emerges and sees before him the serene heights of Science, he proceeds to toil upwards. That this (*il diletto monte*) means the hill of demonstrative Science is indicated by that line

"Sì che il piè fermo sempre era il più basso"

The lower step is the firmer in demonstration, because the propositions which sustain the fabric of argument are the surer and lower down, until we reach the foundation which is the surest of all, because it consists of axiomatic truths . . . The commentators differ about the physical soundness of this as a mechanical description of hill-climbing, and perhaps it is not quite exact. But for allegory it is near enough the poet was thinking more of

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CANTO I his meaning than of his figure.' Whether this is a sound interpretation of the line or not, the identification of this hill with Philosophy would give a meaning and coherence to the whole passage which otherwise seem lacking. The substance would then amount to this. In the middle of his life Dante woke up to the alarming conviction that he had lost himself in the dark forest of his own sins and the political miseries of his country. In his effort to escape he turned to Philosophy, which shone above him as a hill whose top was lighted by the sun, in Dante the sensible image of God. To Virgil, the natural Reason of man, it seems

‘the Mount Delectable,
Which is the source and cause of every joy.’¹

But the Divine Wisdom personified in Beatrice knows that, though not evil, it is yet inadequate. not *there* can man be happy—he must purify himself on another and higher mountain before he can find even an Earthly Paradise.

The Three
Beasts

Whatever the hill represents—Philosophy, or Good Government, or an ideal of Holiness—Dante found himself unequal to the task of climbing it. No sooner had he begun the ascent than his path was barred in turn by three wild beasts—a Panther, a Lion, and a She-wolf. The obvious reference is to *Jer. v. 6*—‘Wherefore a lion out of the forest shall slay them, a wolf of the evenings shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities. every one that goeth out thence shall be torn in pieces. because their

¹ *Inf* 1 77

THE THREE WILD BEASTS 15

transgressions are many, and their backslidings are increased.' The exact symbolism, however, is not easy to determine. Once more we find two main lines of interpretation, the political and the moral. According to the former, the

CANTO I

Political
interpreta-
tion.

Panther light and swift exceedingly
Which with a spotted skin was covered o'er,¹

is Florence with her factions of Guelphs and Ghibellines, Blacks and Whites, and her sudden changes of laws and customs.² In Botticelli's drawing in illustration of this Canto, the spots of the Leopard are in the form of flowers, but it is uncertain whether they are meant for the lily of Florence, or for the flowers of Spring, 'the sweet season' of which Dante speaks in line 43. According to this political view, Dante's meaning is that the factions of Florence barred the way to the political regeneration of Italy, which is symbolized by the sunlit hill

The Lion coming

With head uplifted, and with ravenous hunger,
So that it seemed the air was afraid of him,³

is held to represent the royal house of France. We know that Dante opposed resolutely the intervention of Charles of Valois in Florentine politics, and that the treacherous conduct of this prince justified his opposition. In the *Purgatorio* he compares him to Judas :

'Unarmed he goes, alone, and with the lance
That Judas jousted with, and that he thrusts
So that he makes the paunch of Florence burst.'⁴

¹ *Inf* i 32, 33. ² *Purg* vi 139-151 ³ *Inf*. i 46-48 ⁴ *Purg* xx 73-75.

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CANTO I Many other passages show that to Dante's mind the intervention of France had never proved anything but a curse to Italy. Philip the Fair, the brother of Charles, is the object of his bitterest indignation. He calls him 'the new Pilate,' and denounces the outrage which he committed on Boniface VIII at Anagni,¹ and his carrying away of the Church into the Babylonish captivity at Avignon.² He calls the royal house of France

'the evil tree
Which overshadows all the Christian world,
So that good fruit is seldom gathered from it.'³

The third beast is generally identified with the Papacy

A She-wolf, that with all hungerings
Seemed to be laden in her meagreness,
And many folk has caused to live forlorn.⁴

All through the poem the sin of Avarice is spoken of as a wolf. Plutus, the Guardian of the Fourth Circle, in which this sin is punished, is addressed, 'thou accursed wolf.'⁵ The same name is expressly applied to Avarice on the Fifth Cornice of Purgatory:

Accursed may'st thou be, thou old She-wolf,
That more than all the other beasts hast prey,
Because of hunger infinitely hollow.⁶

Now, Dante appears to regard Avarice as the peculiar vice of the Church. Not indeed, as he well knows, that the Church has any monopoly of this sin, for

¹ *Purg.* xx 85-91

² *Purg.* xxxii 151-160

³ *Purg.* xx 43-45

⁴ *Inf.* i 49-51

⁵ *Inf.* vii 8

⁶ *Purg.* xx. 10-12

he calls it 'the evil which all the world pervades.' CANTO I
 Nevertheless it was obviously his belief that churchmen lay peculiarly open to this temptation. In the Fourth Circle, for example, he notes that most of the Avaricious have tonsured heads, and Virgil informs him that they are clerks, Popes, and Cardinals.¹ In Circle VIII a special Moat is allotted to churchmen who have been guilty of that worst form of Avarice, Simony; and it is to this part of the *Inferno* that the reigning Pope, Boniface VIII, is prophetically consigned.² If, then, we are to identify this She-wolf of Avarice with any particular representative, it must be the Papacy. not, indeed, as the only sinner by any means, but as the one most deeply infected with this vice, and the chief hindrance in the path to the mountain-top. The line, 'Many are the animals with whom she weds,'³ is commonly understood to refer to the numerous political alliances by means of which Rome sought to strengthen her power and increase her wealth, but an equally good interpretation is that Avarice allies itself with many other sins: 'the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.'

Turning to the moral interpretation, the Panther ^{2 Moral interpretation.} is generally regarded as the symbol of Sensuality or Worldly Pleasure; the Lion of Pride or Ambition, and the Wolf, as we have just seen, of Avarice. An old commentator points out that these are the three 'principal vices which commonly assail man at three different periods of his life, namely, Sensuality in youth, Pride or Ambition in manhood, and Avarice

¹ *Inf.* vii. 37-48² *Inf.* xix. 52-57³ *Inf.* i. 100.

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CANTO I or Cupidity in old age.' It is scarcely likely that Dante meant thus to distribute them over the different stages of human life; probably he had in mind the words of St. John, 'the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.' It is a question of great interest how far Dante felt himself personally in danger from these temptations. With regard to the last of them, Avarice, we know that one of the charges on which he was banished from Florence was that of Barratry, embezzlement or misappropriation of public funds during his magistracy. The well-known Dante scholar, Scartazzini, while indignantly defending the poet from the charge of sensuality, does not scruple to say that there is at least a *prima facie* appearance of guilt in this matter of embezzlement. 'We have seen,' he says, 'that exactly in the years which preceded his priorate he was seriously in debt, and that makes us reflect. In a position of power and in want of money at the same time, even the noblest and most honest of men are exposed to great temptations'¹ On this mode of argument, no man's reputation would be safe who was ever in debt. Dante himself indignantly denied the charge. As we shall see, he describes at great length the punishment of Barrators, pouring contempt upon their sin by the very hideousness and grotesqueness of their doom. Much of what he writes of them seems to me to become intelligible only if we regard it as descriptive of the danger in which he himself stood from this very charge; and it is almost impossible to imagine him

¹ *A Companion to Dante*, p. 107.

writing as he does concerning a sin of which he knew himself to be guilty. While, therefore, we must acquit him of this crime, it is still more than possible that Dante had felt the temptation of money, 'the accursed hunger of gold,' even though he never allowed it to corrupt his heart or soil his hands.

Whatever doubt there may be about Avarice, there can be none of Dante's Pride, for he himself expressly acknowledges it. I do not refer to a certain noble pride which meets us everywhere in his works, a high and serene consciousness of his own great powers. That, indeed, he counted a virtue. Aristotle, his master in Ethics, had taught him that the great soul is never ignorant of its own greatness. I refer in particular to what he says of himself as he stands on the Second Cornice of Mount Purgatory, and looks at the Envious whose eyes are sewed up in punishment of their misuse of them

'Mine eyes,' I said, 'will yet be here ta'en from me,
But for short space, for small is the offence
Committed by their being turned with envy.
Far greater is the fear wherein suspended
My soul is, of the torment underneath,
For even now the load down there weighs on me'¹

'The torment underneath' is the punishment of Pride on the First Cornice. In other words, Dante knew that Envy was not one of his besetting sins, and that Pride was, and therefore feared that his proud neck must yet be bent by the stones under which he had seen the souls stagger on the Terrace beneath

¹ *Purg.* xiii 133-138

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CANTO I

But by far the most interesting problem is that which gathers round the Leopard or Panther, the symbol of Sensual Pleasure. There are more passages than one in which Dante *seems* at least to acknowledge this sin. When he reaches the highest Cornice of Purgatory, it is with the utmost difficulty that Virgil and the Angel of the Terrace persuade him to enter the fire which burns the passions of Sensuality away, and there is in his cry of pain an intensity which is the obvious sign of a personal experience.

When I was in it, into molten glass
I would have cast me to refresh myself,
So without measure was the burning there ¹

But without doubt the most interesting passage in this connection is that of *Inferno* xvi 106-114:

I had a cord around about me girt,
And therewithal I whilom had designed
To take the Panther with the painted skin
After I this had all from me unloosed,
As my Conductor had commanded me,
I reached it to him, gathered up and coiled,
Whereat he turned himself to the right side,
And at a little distance from the verge
He cast it down into the deep abyss

The 'deep abyss' is the great precipice which walls round the Eighth Circle of Hell, the prison of the Fraudulent. The depth is so profound that the pilgrims are forced to summon its Guardian-Fiend to carry them down; and their signal to him is the

¹ *Purg* xxviii. 49 51.

casting of this cord from Dante's waist, with which he tells us he had at one time thought 'to take the Panther with the painted skin.' Obviously some symbolism underlies this, which must be more carefully examined when we reach the passage. Meantime I may anticipate to the extent of explaining that there seems to be ground for the tradition that in his earlier years Dante entered the Order of the Franciscans, who are called Cordeliers, from the cord with which they girt themselves. If this is so, the meaning is one of two, according as we take the Panther in its moral or its political sense. Taking it politically, the meaning may be that at one period of his life Dante thought the Franciscan Order could be utilised 'to take the Panther with the painted skin'—that is, to quell the factions of Florence. Taking it morally, it tells us he had once assumed the cord of the Order in the hope of thereby subduing the flesh. In either case, he came to the conviction that the Franciscan cord was not the noose with which the Panther could be caught; and therefore, unloosing it at the command of Virgil, who is Reason personified, he handed it to him to cast into the abyss

In his attempt to climb the sunlit mountain, the three beasts meet him in the order of their malignity: the Panther impeded his way, yet not so violently as to make him lose hope of attaining the heights; the Lion struck him with terror, but the She-wolf made him so utterly despair that he turned and rushed downwards to the dark valley of the savage wood. It is far from easy to understand what he says of

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CANTO I the Panther : so far from discouraging him, it rather
inspired him with good hope :

The time was the beginning of the morning,
And up the sun was mounting with those stars
That with him were, what time the Love Divine
At first in motion set those beauteous things,
So were to me occasion of good hope,
The variegated skin of that wild beast,
The hour of time, and the sweet season.¹

This seems to run counter to experience 'The sweet season' of spring, so far from giving hope of overcoming sensuality, is usually regarded as the season which rather excites it. It has been suggested that Dante means to say If even in the spring-time of my days I am able thus to resist this temptation, how much stronger will my resistance be in the autumn and winter of my life. This, however, seems somewhat forced. Perhaps the simplest way is to ask what is the natural effect of an early morning in the spring-time, just when the sun is rising and before the stars have vanished. There is surely no time when base desires are more incongruous, no time when the freshness and purity of Nature more readily kindle the desire and hope of a better life. If a man cannot be pure in that virginal purity of dawn, he cannot be pure at all. The meaning is not unlike the washing of the face in morning dew which Cato commanded at the foot of Mount Purgatory—the cleansing power of a fresh dewy spring morning. Yet it is to be noted that Dante's 'good hope' is doomed to disappointment. The sun, the

¹ *Inf.* i. 37-43

season, the hour of dawn : all are powerless of themselves to overcome this beautiful wild beast On the Mount of Purification, Dante had to learn that this is the last baseness which sinful man overcomes, and that it must be burnt out of the soul by a more painful fire than the sunshine of a fair spring morning.

Dante's flight down the mountain side was arrested by one solitary figure in 'the desert vast,' whether 'shade or real man' he did not know To his intense joy, he discovers that he is in the presence of the poet Virgil, and as Virgil is to be his companion and guide down all the Circles of Hell and up all the Terraces of Purgatory, we must understand from the outset what he represents in the symbolism of the poem. Dante had an almost superstitious reverence for Virgil, which it is not easy for us to share. He quotes his words almost as he quotes Scripture. He calls him the 'glory of the Latins,' 'that gentle sage who all things knew,' 'the sea of all intelligence,' 'my sweet pedagogue,' 'thou Leader, and thou Lord, and Master thou'; and when at last, having guided him to the Earthly Paradise, he suddenly vanishes, even the presence of Beatrice cannot keep back Dante's tears for

Virgilius, sweetest of all fathers,
Virgilius, to whom I for my salvation gave myself¹

He seems even to have broken off his friendship with the poet Guido Cavalcanti, because he refused Virgil the reverence which Dante thought his due.² What, then, is the reason for this prodigality of

¹ *Purg xxx* 50, 51

² *Inf* x. 61 63

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CANTO I veneration? Why, for instance, does he not choose Aristotle as guide? He calls Aristotle 'the Master of those who know,' 'the Master of our life,' 'the Master and Leader of human reason.' In his prose works he quotes him constantly, and it is seldom that his authority is not final on any disputed point: 'where the Divine judgment of Aristotle opens its mouth, it seems to me that we should pass by the judgment of all other men'¹ It is partly on his *Ethics* that the classification of sins in the *Inferno* is based. We may well wonder why this great authority, who ruled the mediæval intellect, is not chosen as guide through the moral issues of human life. The reason appears to lie in the peculiar nature and quality of Dante's mind. It was a mind which delighted in the manifoldness of the symbols with which it worked the greater the number of meanings and correspondences they had the better they suited his purpose. Now, without doubt, Virgil stood in Dante's imagination for more than even Aristotle could stand for. He was a poet, and therefore the representative of the human intellect working in the highest region of thought, he was a citizen of Rome in its golden days of Empire, and he lived at the exact moment of time when Paganism and Christianity met—that rare and pregnant moment when the natural heart grew prophetic in its yearning for the New Era. We can, therefore, distinguish at least four reasons why Dante chose him as his guide.

As poet.

To begin with, there is his obvious admiration of

¹ *Conv* iv 17, *Inf*. iv 130-133, etc

THE THREE WILD BEASTS 25

him as a poet. In his own Limbo, the four great CANTO I
poets of antiquity hail him with one voice: 'Honour
the loftiest poet!' In the passage before us Dante
acknowledges him as his master in style.

'Thou art my master, and my author thou,
Thou art alone the one from whom I took
The beautiful style that hath done honour to me.'

He regrets that the study of his works had fallen into neglect, a fact which he indicates figuratively when he says that Virgil 'seemed from long silence hoarse.' As we saw a little ago, he quarrelled with 'the first of his friends' because he held Virgil in disdain.

In the second place, Virgil stood in Dante's mind As symbol of
Roman
Empire for the Roman Empire in its ideal glory, its golden age, 'under the good Augustus.' The Empire was, in his view, the heaven-ordained seat and home of the Church. For the express purpose of founding it, Æneas was brought by God Himself from Troy to Italy, as surely as Israel from Egypt to Canaan;² and the poet who in its high imperial prime sang the fortunes of its founder, was the worthiest guide to that Earthly Paradise which it was the function and duty of the Roman Emperor to create. The descent of Æneas into the invisible world in the Sixth Book of the *Æneid*, and the prophetic vision there given him of Rome's future greatness, were undoubtedly additional reasons for choosing Virgil as his guide. It is on these grounds that some com-

¹ *Inf.* i 86-87

² *Inf.* ii 13-27, *Conv.* iv 5, *De Mon.* i 16, ii, 7, 12, 13, etc

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CANTO I mentators regard Virgil as the symbol of Imperial Authority, and interpret the poem accordingly.

**As symbol of
Natural
Reason**

It can scarcely be doubted, however, that Dante's chief reason was that Virgil represented to him the natural human intellect at its best—the highest, sanest wisdom of antiquity, unaided by Revelation. We shall see the reverence which Dante pays to the myths of Paganism, recognizing in them a natural revelation of ethics, written on the heart. In Virgil he sees the man of the pre-Christian world in whom this natural revelation shone with clearest ray. Being a Pagan, he could not—from Dante's Catholic standpoint—exercise the three distinctively Christian or theological virtues, Faith, Hope, and Charity; but in common with the best souls of the heathen world, he practised the four natural or cardinal virtues, Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude. As Virgil himself says to Sordello, speaking of his own abode in Limbo

‘There dwell I among those who the three saintly
Virtues did not put on, and without vice
The others knew, and followed all of them’¹

Virgil, therefore, stands for the natural Intellect and Conscience of man at their highest; and for this union of Conscience and Intellect, unaided by special revelation, I shall use the word ‘Reason’: reserving ‘Wisdom’ for Beatrice, the symbol of that higher development of the spiritual, moral, and intellectual powers produced under the Christian Revelation.

**As prophet of
Christianity**

This leads us to a fourth reason which seldom receives its due recognition, namely, that Virgil stood

¹ *Purg* vii 34-36

on the borderland between Paganism and Christianity. Even the Church, as one has said, regarded him as 'a species of Pagan Isaiah'; though, indeed, we reach a truer parallel if we call him rather the John the Baptist of Paganism—the greatest of the old era and the herald of the new. This was certainly Dante's conception of him. When, for example, the poet Statius meets Virgil on Mount Purgatory, he stoops reverently to embrace his feet in gratitude for that prophecy of the Christ to which he owed his conversion to the Christian faith. The reference is, of course, to the well-known passage in the *Eclogues* of Virgil

'Thou first directedst me
Towards Parnassus in its grotts to drink,
And then didst light me on to God
Thou didst as he who walketh in the night,
Who bears his light behind and helpeth not himself,
But maketh wise the persons after him,
When thou didst say "The age renews itself,
Justice returns and man's primeval time,
And a new progeny descends from heaven"
Through thee I poet was, through thee a Christian .
Already was the world in every part
Pregnant with the true creed, disseminated
By the messengers of the eternal kingdom,
And the word of thine, touched on above,
With the new preachers was in unison.'¹

¹ *Purg* xxi. 64-80, Virgil, *Ecl* iv 5-7. 'Since the time of Constantine passages of Virgil's poems, the Fourth Eclogue more especially, were regarded as Christian prophecies. The Muse had inspired the poet who lived on the borderland between two ages with some gifted verses, which accidentally appeared to prophesy the birth of Christ. The unconscious Pagan was elevated to the rank of a prophet of the Messiah, he became the favourite poet of the Church and of the credulous Middle Ages, and for centuries his books were quoted as the oracle of a sibylline seer, and appeal was made blindly to them in the same way as it is now frequently made to the Bible'—GREGOROVITZ, *Rome in the Middle Ages*, iv. 671.

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CANTO I — It is obvious that one who thus stood on the borderland between Natural and Revealed Religion was a fit guide from Nature to Grace—which is precisely Virgil's function in the poem. It explains among other things the limits within which his guidance works. As the natural Reason of man, he knows all the pathways of Hell, and can show us sin in all its forms and final issues, for this, no supernatural revelation is needed, the natural intellect and conscience suffice. It is somewhat different, however, when we reach the *Purgatorio*. Virgil, indeed, is still our guide, for Reason knows the necessity, and in some small part the means, of penitence and purification. But only in some small part. Hence on the Mount where sins are purged, we find that Virgil has often to ask his way, and lean on powers and experiences beyond himself. In other words, so far as the penitent life is concerned, the natural mind and conscience need the aid of a wisdom higher than its own—the experience of souls more advanced in that life, the guidance of angels, the words of Scripture, and the hymns, anthems, and prayers of the Church. Finally, when the Earthly Paradise is gained, Virgil's power of guidance fails entirely, and he yields place to Beatrice, symbol of that diviner Wisdom of Faith, Hope, and Love, which alone can open to any soul of man the Paradise of God. In Virgil's own words as they climb the Mount:

‘What Reason seeth here,
Myself can tell thee, beyond that await
For Beatrice, since ’tis a work of faith.’¹

¹ *Purg* xviii 46-48

THE THREE WILD BEASTS 29

In the passage before us, the scope and limits of his guidance are stated by himself more fully CANTO I
—

‘Therefore I think and judge it for thy best
Thou follow me, and I will be thy guide,
And lead thee hence through an eternal place,
Where thou shalt hear the desperate lamentations,
Shalt see the ancient spirits disconsolate,
Who cry out each one for the second death,
And then thou shalt see those who contented are
Within the fire, because they hope to come,
Whene’er it may be, to the blessed people,
To whom then if thou wishest to ascend,
A soul shall be for that than I more worthy,
With her at my departure I shall leave thee,
Because that Emperor, who reigns above,
In that I was rebellious to his law,
Wills that through me none comes into his city
He governs everywhere, and there he reigns,
There is his city and his lofty seat
O happy he whom thereto he elects!’¹

Virgil begins his guidance by a mysterious prophecy, the meaning of which remains unknown to this day. Dante, he says, must take another path of escape, because the malignity of the She-wolf is so great that she destroys all who pass her way. But her doom is at hand. a Greyhound comes who will chase her back to Hell from which envy first set her free:

‘Many are the animals with whom she weds,
And more they shall be still, until the Greyhound

¹ *Inf* 1. 112-120 In addition to his reputation as a prophet of Christianity, Virgil was transformed by mediæval legends into a magician and enchanter. A trace of these legends may be found in *Inf* ix 22-30, but had Dante accepted this darker view, he must have set him among the Diviners in Circle VIII. (Canto xx)

CANTO I
—

Comes, who shall make her perish in her pain.
 He shall not feed on either earth or pelf,
 But upon wisdom, and on love and virtue,
 'Twixt Feltro and Feltro shall his nation be.
 Of that low Italy shall he be the salvation,
 On whose account the maid Camilla died,
 Euryalus, Turnus, Nisus, of their wounds,
 Through every city shall he hunt her down,
 Until he shall have driven her back to Hell,
 There from whence envy first did let her loose'¹

This passage has given rise to a whole literature; for, as one has wittily said, 'every interpreter of Dante tries to slip his own collar on to the famous Greyhound.' Fortunately, for the understanding of the poem as a whole, it is not necessary to have any collar at all. The only hint of his identity is that his nation lies between Feltro and Feltro, from which is inferred the interpretation most widely received in modern times, namely, that the expected deliverer of Italy was Can Grande della Scala, lord of Verona, at whose court Dante found refuge during his exile. The title of Greyhound is regarded as a play on Can or Cane, a dog.² The territory of Can Grande lies between Feltro, a city of Friuli, and Montefeltro in Romagna. He was appointed Imperial Vicar, and elected Leader of the Ghibelline League of Lombardy.

¹ *Inf* 1 100 111

² A story is told of a very different play on the word. One day when Dante was Can Grande's guest at Verona, 'a boy was concealed under the table, who, collecting the bones that were thrown there by the guests, according to the custom of those times, heaped them up at Dante's feet. When the tables were removed, the great heap appearing, Cane pretended to show much astonishment, and said, "Certainly, Dante is a great devourer of meat." To which Dante readily replied, "My lord, you would not have seen so many bones had I been a dog (cane)."' See Rossetti's poem, *Dante at Verona*.

THE THREE WILD BEASTS 31

Many passages undoubtedly prove that his character excited great expectations in Dante. Even at the early age of nine he discerns his future nobility and greatness.

CANTO I
—

‘But ere the Gascon cheat the noble Henry,
Some sparkles of his virtue shall appear
In caring not for silver nor for toils
So recognized shall his magnificence
Become hereafter, that his enemies
Will not have power to keep mute tongues about it
On him rely, and on his benefits,
By him shall many people be transformed,
Changing condition, rich and mendicant’¹

To this Can Grande Dante dedicated his *Paradiso*; and it is thought by many that he is again referred to in an equally mysterious passage in the *Purgatorio*

‘For verily I see, and hence narrate it,
The stars already near to bring the time,
From every hindrance safe and every bar,
Within which a five-hundred, ten, and five,
Sent by God, shall slay the thief,
With that same giant who with her is sinning’²—

the giant being Philip the Fair of France, and the thief the harlot of the Papacy. The ‘five-hundred, ten, and five’ are, in Roman numerals, DXV, or transposed DVX, Leader, and much ingenuity has been spent in making 515 out of the letters of Can

¹ *Par* xvii 82-90 The Gascon is Pope Clement v, under whom the Papacy was removed to Avignon In *Inf* xix 83 he is called ‘a pastor without law’ See also *Par* xxvii 58, xxx 142 The treachery referred to is that Clement at first favoured the cause of Henry vii in Italy, but afterwards, under the menaces of Philip the Fair, withdrew his support

² *Purg* xxxiii 40-45

32 THE SAVAGE WOOD AND

CANTO I Grande's name. The reference to 'Feltro and Feltro,' however, has given rise to a widely different interpretation. Spelt without capitals, the allusion would be to 'a person of lowly birth, born between felt and felt—that is, in the garb of poverty'; and at a very early date this person was identified with Christ Himself. In the Middle Ages there existed a widespread expectation of the Second Advent, in which Dante may have shared. Since Virgil was believed to have foretold the First Advent, there would be a certain appropriateness in putting into his mouth here a prophecy of the Second. Fortunately, as already said, it is in no way essential to an understanding of the spiritual substance of the poem to decide the problem. The one thing certain is that Dante looked for some Messiah, and that traces of this hope are scattered throughout his various works, but, as one says, 'he himself neither knew nor could know who he was to be. Hence it is quite possible that at different times he may have built his hopes upon different personages, both in Can Grande, and in an Emperor, and perhaps too in a Pope'¹. We know that when Henry of Luxemburg was elected Emperor, he firmly believed the long-wished-for hour had struck, but after his untimely death in 1313, it is more than likely that his hope of a Deliverer was a homeless wanderer like himself. A passage in the *De Monarchia* seems to hint that in the end it turned from every earthly aid. Speaking of the Church's misuse of her wealth, which is 'the patrimony of the

¹ Letter of Scartazzini quoted in Vernon's *Readings on the Inferno*,
 1 30 For list of principal interpretations of the *Veltro*, see pp 26, 27

THE THREE WILD BEASTS 33

poor,' he asks indignantly: 'What shall we say to
shepherds like these? What shall we say when the
substance of the Church is wasted, while the private
estates of their own kindred are enlarged? But
perchance it is better to proceed with what is set
before us; and in religious silence to wait for our
Saviour's help.'¹

CANTO I
—

¹ *De Mon.* 11 12

CHAPTER II

THE THREE BLESSED LADIES

CANTO II
Dante's fear
of the
Pilgrimage

WE come now to the true beginning of the *Commedia*, for the opening Canto is merely introductory to the whole poem. This is proved, among other things, by the fact that Dante in this Second Canto makes his invocation to the Muses, while the corresponding invocations in the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* occur in the opening Cantos. It is perhaps worth while noticing in passing that the three invocations rise in solemnity with the increasing sanctity of the subject: here the poet appeals simply to the Muses, in the *Purgatorio* to the 'holy Muses', and in the *Paradiso* to 'good Apollo'—the sun, which he calls in the *Convito* the sensible image of God.

When Virgil first offered his guidance, Dante tells us he was all eagerness to follow him, but when the hour of evening came, the shadows of doubt fell with the shadows of the night. The loneliness of the pilgrimage, the toil and greatness of the way, the wofulness of the sights which awaited him, and the uncertainty of his own powers—all made him pause in irresolution and fear. He does not say whether it is the fear of the author or the fear of

THE THREE BLESSED LADIES 35

the sinner, but we cannot doubt that he was assailed by both. A poem like the *Commedia*, in which the whole life, spirit, and learning of the Middle Ages are condensed, cannot have been undertaken and carried out without many a fear and hesitation, its very greatness must have made the heart that conceived it tremble and almost despair. Much more important, however, is the moral hesitation. Dante knows that he is beginning the great pilgrimage of a sinful human soul to its God. At first, eagerness to escape from the dark and savage wilderness of his sins uplifts his heart, but this is quickly followed by the natural recoil of despondency. The man who sees at once the lowness of his own soul and far above him that righteousness of God which is 'like the great mountains,' cannot but have his Slough of Despond, his dark hour when the great enterprise of salvation almost drops from his trembling hands.

CANTO II
—

In his perplexity and fear Dante takes counsel of Reason in the person of Virgil, appealing to him to decide whether his powers are equal to the vast and mysterious pilgrimage. It is true, he grants, that two other instances exist of successful journeys into the Invisible. Virgil himself had sung how Æneas had 'dared to enter the Inferno alone with the Sibyl in search of his father Anchises, in the face of so many dangers',¹ and Paul, 'the Chosen Vessel,' tells how 'he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.'² But was it not presumption to dream that he could

Æneas and
St Paul

¹ *Conv* iv 26

² *2 Cor* xii. 4

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CANTO II descend to Hell with Æneas, and mount to Heaven
— with Paul?

‘But I, why hither come, or who concedes it?
I not Æneas am, I am not Paul,
Nor I nor others think me worthy of it’¹

Paul’s vision, for instance, was given for the comfort of the Christian Faith, and Æneas was worthy to become a pilgrim of the Invisible because he was the chosen father of that mighty Roman Empire which was destined of Heaven to be the seat and home of that Faith on earth,—

‘the holy place wherein
Sits the successor of the greatest Peter’²

This setting of Æneas and Paul side by side is the first instance of a characteristic of Dante which meets us constantly throughout the poem, namely, the parallelism which he follows between sacred and profane history and legend. His custom is to give from both alternate examples of sins and virtues. To understand him, we must dismiss from our minds the sharp contrast we are accustomed to draw between Holy Scripture and the writings of such men as Aristotle and Virgil. The *Æneid* is quoted as of almost parallel authority with Scripture, Æneas and Paul are set side by side. If we wish to understand why, we must study Dante’s political theories as set forth at length in the *De Monarchia*. A large portion of that curious treatise is occupied with a series of arguments to prove that the empire of the world belonged of right to the Romans as the noblest

¹ *Inf.* II. 81 33.

² *Inf.* II. 23, 24

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CANTO II

people upon earth. One of his proofs is that Æneas 'was ennobled from all three continents both by his forefathers and his wives.' He proceeds to show that both forefathers and wives belonged to Asia, Africa, and Europe, and on this he founds the curious argument that universal monarchy—the right to govern the three continents—belongs lawfully to his descendants. 'Who,' he asks triumphantly, 'will not rest persuaded that the father of the Romans, and therefore the Romans themselves, were the noblest people under heaven? Who can fail to see the divine predestination shown forth by the double meeting of blood from every part of the world in the veins of one man?'¹ An equally curious argument is used in the *Convito*, from the contemporaneusness of the birth of David and the founding of Rome. 'It was at one and the same time that David was born and that Rome was born, that is, that Æneas came from Troy into Italy, which was the origin of the most noble city of Rome, as our books bear witness. Thus the divine election of the Roman Empire is made very evident by the birth of the holy city, which was contemporaneous with that of the root from which sprang the race of Mary.'² So sacred in his eyes was Rome that it became the earthly symbol of the Celestial City—'that Rome where Christ is Roman.'³ It is certainly not too much to say with Dr. Moore that to Dante 'the people of Rome, as founders of the Empire, were as much God's "chosen people" as the Jews. Each was so "chosen" for

¹ *De Mon* ii 3

² *Conv* iv 5

³ *Purg* xxxii 102

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CANTO II carrying out one branch of His great twofold design; both these branches, moreover, coming, as it were, to maturity together in the nearly synchronous events of the establishment of the Roman Empire and the Incarnation of Christ.¹

Virgil's
encourage-
ment

Returning to the narrative, let us see by what arguments Reason overcame Dante's shrinking from the arduous pilgrimage. Virgil tells him plainly that his soul is 'attainted with cowardice'. Now, if there was any one thing the strenuous soul of Dante could not bear, it was any cowardly shrinking from the moral responsibilities of life. We shall see immediately how he invented a special place of torment for the Neutrals—men and angels who through cowardly fear were neither for God nor against Him. His scorn of them is intense. Heaven and Hell alike reject them, and earth will not tolerate their memory. The charge of cowardice, therefore, was precisely that best fitted to sting Dante to activity. Probably what he had specially in view was the virtue which Aristotle calls Magnanimity or great-mindedness—the mean between vanity and pusillanimity, between an over- and an under-estimate of one's self. 'A high-minded' (or great-souled) 'person seems to be one who regards himself as worthy of high things, and who is worthy of them.'² That it is this high-minded estimate of

¹ *Studies in Dante*, second series, pp 21, 22

² Aristotle's *Ethics*, bk iv 7. Comp *Conv* 1 11. High mindedness is distinguished from small mindedness, which under estimates, and vanity, which over-estimates, its own worth. According to Aquinas, when a man 'denies of himself some greatness which at the same time he perceives to be in himself,' he is guilty of self depreciation, which is sinful because a departure from truth (*Summa*, ii ii q 113, a 1)

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himself which Virgil is urging on him is proved CANTO II
by the name which Dante here gives him—'the
Magnanimous,' the Great-minded :

'If I have well thy language understood,'
Replied that shade of the Magnanimous,
'Thy soul attainted is with cowardice.'¹

In short, it is the sign of true greatness of soul not only to be equal to great enterprises, but to *know* one's self equal to them Dante's fears and doubts made him under-estimate his own powers, and Virgil, who is Reason, seeks to rouse his 'magnanimity,' a due and reasonable sense of the greatness of his own soul Nothing is more characteristic of Dante: to undervalue one's self is no virtue, it is mere cowardice, which turns men back from 'honoured enterprise.'

But Virgil has a still more potent persuasion. The Three
Heavenly
Ladies. Dante knew well that Reason by itself could never carry his great venture to a successful issue, or finally deliver his soul from sin. Hence Virgil—who, we must constantly remind ourselves, is Reason personified—assures him that behind himself heavenly powers are interested in his salvation. Not of his own motion had he offered his guidance, the task was laid upon him from above. 'A fair saintly Lady' from Heaven, no other than Beatrice herself, had ventured into Hell to entreat his aid for one who is 'a friend of hers, and not the friend of fortune.' She herself, she tells him, had been entreated for him by another heavenly Lady, 'Lucia, foe of all that cruel

¹ *Inf* II 43-45

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CANTO II is.' Lucia, in her turn, had been entreated by a third Lady, who said to her

‘Thy faithful one now stands in need
Of thee, and unto thee I recommend him.’

This is the Virgin Mary, called here ‘a gentle Lady,’ and, like her Son, never directly named in the *Inferno* ¹

Lucia.

Of these ‘three blessed Ladies,’ the least conspicuous in the poem is Lucia. We meet her twice again, once in the *Purgatorio*, when in his sleep she carries Dante up to the Gate of St. Peter.

‘There came a Lady, and said “I am Lucia,
Let me take this one up who is asleep,
So will I make his journey easier for him”’ ²,

and again in the *Paradiso*, where St. Bernard points her out in her place in the snow-white Rose of the redeemed. She is generally regarded as Dante’s patron saint, perhaps because he was once threatened with blindness through excessive reading and weeping ³. Plumptre says, ‘The martyr-saint of Syracuse, who in the Diocletian persecution had torn out her eyes that her beauty might not minister to man’s lust, was much honoured in Florence, and two churches, still standing, were dedicated to her. The story of her death had made her the patron saint of all who suffered from diseases of the eye’ ⁴

¹ *Inf* ii 49 126

² *Purg* ix 55 57

³ *Conv* iii 9 ‘Having wearied my eyes much with the labour of reading, so weakened were the visual spirits, that all the stars appeared to me to be blurred by some white mist’—Cf *Vita Nuova*, 32, for the effect on his eyes of excessive weeping

⁴ In Art she sometimes bears a lighted lamp, sometimes a dish containing her two eyes, and sometimes an awl, on which, in rare instances, her eyes are skewered. See Mrs. Jameson’s *Sacred and Legendary Art*, ii 613 619

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Dante probably chooses her now as symbol of the better opening of the eyes of the soul—as her name implies, the illuminating grace of God CANTO II

Naturally, the Virgin Mary occupies a much more conspicuous place in the poem. It is from her that the first movement of Divine aid to Dante springs: at her entreaty, Lucia and Beatrice act on his behalf. It is she who 'breaks the stern judgment of Heaven'. On every Terrace of Mount Purgatory, the first example of each virtue by which penitent souls are urged on to holiness, is drawn from the Virgin's life. In the *Paradiso*, she is called 'the Rose in which the Word Divine became incarnate'. Her face is likest Christ's, and in the mystic Rose of Paradise her place is nearest God. Through her, power is given to gaze upon the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. In Dante she represents the prevenient grace of God—that Divine love which neither hangs upon our merits nor waits for the cry of our need. Hence St. Bernard in his great prayer to her says that her aid outruns our prayers and anticipates our wants:

'Not only thy benignity gives succour
To him who asketh it, but oftentimes
Forerunneth of its own accord the asking.'¹

But the principal interest and difficulty gather round the third of the Ladies, Beatrice, for love of whom 'he issued from the vulgar herd.'² The generally received view is that which identifies her with Beatrice, daughter of a Florentine gentleman, Folco Portinari, a near neighbour of the Alighieri family

¹ *Par xxxiii* 16-18

² *Inf* II 105.

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CANTO II This, however, has been denied by many commentators. In the beginning of the *Vita Nuova*, Dante says of her that she 'was called Beatrice by many who knew not what to call her'; from which the inference has been drawn that the name Beatrice was employed as a screen to hide the true object of Dante's love, and that it was only the mistaken tradition of later times which identified her with Beatrice Portinari. The very existence of Beatrice as a woman of flesh and blood has been and is denied, and she has been resolved into a mere symbolic personification, standing for Ideal Womanhood, or Philosophy, Theology, the Ideal Church, or the Ideal Empire. For my own part, whether she was Beatrice Portinari or another, I have no doubt she was in the first instance a real woman. When, for example, Dante meets her glorified spirit in the Earthly Paradise, she speaks of her 'buried flesh' and her 'fair members . . . which scattered are in earth', and this can scarcely refer to a mere symbolic abstraction¹. Just as little doubt, however, is there that this lady, whoever she was, passed through a marvellous process of idealization 'into something rich and strange' in the mystical imagination of the poet, becoming, as we have seen, the symbol of Heavenly Wisdom. Assuming that she was Beatrice Portinari, we know that she was married in 1287 to Simone de' Bardi of the great Florentine banking house, and that she died in 1290 in her twenty-fourth year. In his earliest work, the *Vita Nuova*, Dante tells us the story of his love in that peculiar mystical manner

¹ *Purg.* xxxi. 47-51

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CANTO II

of his which has made it a beautiful enigma ever since. It was in his ninth year that he saw her for the first time, 'clad in a subdued and goodly crimson'; and at the sudden vision he tells us that 'the spirit of life which hath its dwelling in the secretest chamber of the heart began to tremble so violently that the least pulses of my body shook therewith.' Nine years after he met her in the street, and for the first time received her salutation. We need not hesitate to believe, then, that Beatrice was a real woman, whom Dante's intensely mystical imagination transfigured into a symbol of that Heavenly Wisdom whose eyes, as he says in the *Convito*, are her demonstrations of the truth, and her smile her persuasions of it¹ After her death in 1290, he resolved to write some great work in her praise, and of this the *Commedia* is the fulfilment. The closing words of the *Vita Nuova* are 'After writing this sonnet, it was given unto me to behold a very wonderful vision: wherein I saw things which determined me that I would say nothing further of this most blessed one, until such time as I could discourse more worthily concerning her. And to this end I labour all I can, as she well knoweth. Wherefore if it be His pleasure through whom is the life of all things, that my life continue with me a few years, it is my hope that I shall yet write concerning her what hath not before been written of any woman. After the which, may it seem good unto Him who is the Master of Grace, that my spirit should go hence to behold the glory of its lady: to wit, of that blessed Beatrice who now

¹ *Conv* iii 15

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CANTO II gazeth continually on His countenance *qui est per omnia sæcula benedictus Laus Deo.*¹

It is, then, this Beatrice, symbol of Divine Wisdom, who, for Dante's salvation, leaves her place in Heaven beside the ancient Rachel, symbol of Contemplation,¹ enters the Inferno, and charges Virgil to guide him to herself. Nothing could show more clearly what is undoubtedly one of Dante's leading convictions, namely, the essential unity of Nature and Grace. Virgil is simply the servant of Grace: from her, in the person of Beatrice, he takes his commands, and to her, in the person of Beatrice, he conducts the soul. In other words, although there is indeed a distinction, there is no real antagonism, between Faith and Reason. The natural morality of the cardinal virtues, which constitute the Earthly Paradise, leads to the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Love, without which the Celestial Paradise cannot be attained. The truths of Christian Theology presuppose those of Natural Science and Philosophy. Just as Paul speaks of Law as our pedagogue to bring us to Christ, so Dante calls Virgil or Reason, 'the sweet pedagogue.'² This essential unity of Virgil and Beatrice, Nature and Grace, Reason and Faith, is expressed in another mystical form in the *Convito*. Dante there compares the Ten Heavens to the various sciences which together constitute Philosophy or Wisdom. The seven Planets, he says, correspond to the seven Sciences of the *Trivium* and *Quadrivium* which made up the

¹ *Inf* ii 100 102, *Par* xxxii 79

² *Purg* xii 3, *Gal* iii 24, Vulgate 'Itaque lex pedagogs noster fuit in Christo'

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CANTO II

mediæval curriculum of education: Grammar, Dialectics, Rhetoric, Arithmetic, Music, Geometry, and Astronomy (or, as it was then called, Astrology). The eighth sphere, the Starry Heaven, with its Milky Way, represents Physics and Metaphysics; the ninth or Crystalline Heaven, Moral Philosophy; while the tenth or Empyrean, to which the rest lead, and which enfolds them all, is 'Divine Science, which is called Theology.'¹ In fine, Grace includes Nature: Wisdom, like the Empyrean, folds in its sphere every earthly science—that Wisdom of which it was written of old. 'When He prepared the heavens, I was there; when with a sure law and a circle He entrenched the abysses, when He established the æther above, and balanced the fountains of the waters, when He marked out its limits for the sea, and gave laws to the waters that they should not exceed their bounds; when He appointed the foundations of the earth: then was I with Him, disposing of all things, and rejoicing in every day'²

¹ *Conv* ii 14, 15 For explanation of the mediæval curriculum, see Ruskin's *Mornings in Florence*, 'The Strait Gate'

² *Prov* viii 27-30, Vulgate, quoted in *Conv* iii 15 For further notice of Beatrice, see the biographical chapter on Dante at the beginning, pp. xxi xxxii

CHAPTER III

ANTE-HELL OF THE NEUTRALS

CANTO III THE Third Canto brings us somewhat suddenly to the Gate of Hell. How he reached it, or where exactly it was, Dante does not say. Since he conceived of the Inferno as directly under Jerusalem,¹ its entrance may have been in that valley of Hinnom which has given us the word Gehenna. The only guardian of the Gate is the awful superscription of despair. In this it differs from the Gate of Purgatory, which is double-locked and guarded by an angel with a sword.² Doubtless by this contrast Dante means to indicate the ease with which a man enters the open gate of sin—the ‘*facilis descensus Averno*’ of Virgil—and the difficulty with which he climbs his way back to virtue. We may note in passing that though now the Gate of Hell stands wide without a sentinel, there was one occasion when entrance was disputed. In the Eighth Canto, Dante, following the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, tells how the hosts of Hell resisted Christ’s descent to release

The Gate of Hell.

¹ *Inf* xxxiv 112 115. According to Jewish and Mohammedan belief, based on *Joel* iii 2, 12, the Last Judgment was to take place in the valley of Jehoshaphat. Dante refers to this belief in *Inf* x 10 12.

² *Purg* ix 76 138.

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'the spirits in prison,' but so impotently that the CANTO III Gate 'finds itself without a fastening still.'¹

Of the inscription over the Gate-way, only the last ~~inscription~~ line seems generally familiar.

'All hope abandon, ye who enter in'

The rest of the inscription, however, is of equal interest, since it gives us Dante's view of the necessity for the existence of a Hell

'Through me the way is to the city dolent !
Through me the way is to eternal dole ,
Through me the way among the people lost
Justice incited my sublime Creator ,
Created me Divine Omnipotence,
The highest Wisdom and the Primal Love
Before me there were no created things,
Only eterne, and I eternal dure '²

The last two lines give us the time and occasion which called Hell into existence Before it, there existed only 'eternal things,'—the first matter, the heavens, and the orders of angels which govern them³ But when the great rebellion took place in Heaven, this prison-house was 'prepared for the devil and his angels' The creation of it is attributed to the whole Trinity, for in the theology of Thomas Aquinas, whom Dante follows throughout, Power is the attribute of the Father, Wisdom of the Son, and Love of the Spirit 'the omnipotence of the Father

¹ *Inf* viii 125 127 *Gospel of Nicodemus*, xiii xix On the approach of Christ, 'the prince (of Hell) said to his impious officers, Shut the brass gates of cruelty, and make them fast with iron bars, and fight courageously, lest we be taken captives' (xvi 4)

² *Inf* lii 1-9

³ *Comp Par* vii 130 138

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CANTO III strikes down all who oppose His will; the wisdom of the Son ordains chastisements proportionate to the sinner's deserts, and the charity of the Holy Ghost demands their infliction, as part of that eternal moral order which all creatures must acknowledge, whether in the joy of the blessed, or in the impotent, despairing rage of the damned '¹ That which moved the Trinity was Justice. Dante cannot conceive of any Power, Wisdom, or Love, worthy to be called Divine, which could be indifferent to the eternal distinction between good and evil. Even the Love of God, if it were possible to conceive it as independent of a law of righteousness, would mean moral indifference, a Divine Laodiceanism. 'It is not fit,' says Anselm, 'that God should allow anything disordered in his kingdom, and if the Divine Wisdom did not inflict these pains, the universe itself, the order of which God should preserve, would suffer a certain deformity from its violated beauty, and Divine Providence would seem to fail '² Further, Dante was unable to conceive of 'the larger hope' of these modern days, to him, Hell endured eternally, and its most awful punishment was its utter absence of hope. It was not, as so many have thought, because he was a man of hard and cruel spirit, incapable of appreciating the grace and mercy of God. We shall, indeed, meet with a few traces of an almost ferocious severity, as when he flung the soul of Filippo Argenti back into the mire of Styx, and tore out the hair of Bocca degli Abati;³ nevertheless

¹ Hettlinger's *Dante's Divina Commedia*, p. 102

² *Cur Deus Homo*, I. 12, 15

³ *Inf.* viii 37 63, xxxii 97 111

the prevailing characteristic of this man is not a love of eternal tortures, but the most tender pity and yearning for the lost—a pity so excessive that Reason, in the person of Virgil, feels called upon at times to rebuke it. Again and again he weeps as he passes from Circle to Circle. When he hears the sad story of Francesca da Rimini, for very pity he swoons and falls to the ground like a dead man¹. Nor is it any want of appreciation of the grace of God that makes him represent Hell as a hopeless prison

CANTO III

‘Infinite Goodness hath such ample arms
That it receives whatever turns to it’²

So says King Manfred at the base of Mount Purgatory—a man stained with horrible crimes, excommunicated by the Church, his very bones torn up and flung beyond the borders of the Papal territory, yet saved by one cry for mercy in the article of death. We may well ask why a man like Dante, understanding thus how infinite is the grace of God, and yearning with an agony of pity over the fate of the lost, should yet feel that an eternal Hell is a necessary issue of Divine Justice. Doubtless there are many reasons, but one is wrought into the substance of the poem, namely, that it is never God’s grace that fails, but man’s own will. ‘Infinite Goodness hath such ample arms’ that one cry of true repentance at the last hour is enough for salvation. But a man may, by persistent abuse of his free-will, lose

¹ *Inf* v 139 142

² *Purg* iii 112 135 Compare the dying cry of Buonconte of Monte feltro, *Purg* v 88-129

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CANTO III
— its freedom, becoming so rooted and grounded in sin that even this one cry is at last beyond his power. For such a man, said Dante with his inexorable logic, what is left but Hell?—Hell, not as an external place, but, in the first instance, as a state of his own soul. For in the *Inferno* this is beyond doubt Dante's leading thought that the punishment of sin is simply sin itself,¹ the narrowing down of the soul to its one master vice, and its hopeless imprisonment therein, through having sinned away the very power of true repentance. As the guilty king in *Hamlet* says.

‘What then? what rests?’

Try what repentance can what can it not?²

Yet what can it, when one can not repent?’

Naturally the inscription, ‘All hope abandon, ye who enter in,’ makes Dante hesitate to cross the threshold, and it is only when Virgil with joyful countenance assures him this is not his place, that he is comforted

‘The good of
Intellect’

‘Thou shalt behold the people dolorous

Who have foregone the good of intellect’³

We must remember that Dante uses the word ‘intellect’ in a higher sense than that common among ourselves. In his writings it is not far from what we mean by ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’. He calls God ‘pure intellect.’⁴ The joy and nobility of all spirits, human and angelic, depend on the degree in which this pure

¹ *Wisdom of Solomon*, xi 16 ‘Wherewithal a man sinneth, by the same also shall he be punished’, ‘Whereas men have lived dissolutely and unrighteously, Thou hast tormented them with their own abominations’ (xii 23)

² *Inf* iii 17, 18

³ *Conv* iii 7

intellect pervades them Further, all mediæval CANTO III
 theology, as one says, started from the words of
 John xvii. 3: 'This is eternal life, to know Thee the
 only true God.' To know God is the one final happi-
 ness of the intellect of man, or, as Aristotle puts
 it, 'the true is the good of the intellect.'¹ It is the
 Beatific Vision of the mystics This desire for Truth,
 and God who is Truth, exists in us as an original and
 perpetual thirst, and if we strive to quench it from
 any but its natural and appointed fountain, it turns
 into an endless torture Thus Dante, writing of the
Paradiso, says. 'It will speak of the blessed souls
 discovered in each sphere, and will declare that true
 beatitude to consist in knowing the source of Truth,
 as appears by John, where he says, "This is the true
 beatitude, to know the only true God."'² On the
 other hand, speaking of the lost, he calls them 'those
 Intelligences who are in exile from the eternal
 fatherland, and who cannot philosophize, because
 love is in them entirely extinguished, and to philo-
 sophize, as has been already said, love is necessary.
 Wherefore we see that the infernal Intelligences are
 deprived of the sight of this most beautiful Lady
 (Philosophy or Wisdom, the daughter of God), and
 because she is the *beatitude of the intellect*, her loss is
 most bitter and full of every sadness'³ This, there-
 fore, is the real torment of the exiles of eternity It

¹ *Conv* ii 14 The reference is to Aristotle's *Ethics* vi 2 'The apprehension of truth is the function of both the intellectual parts of the soul' (desire and reason)

² *Epistle to Can Grande*, sect 33

³ *Conv* iii 13 The references to this thirst of the 'intellect' for God are innumerable See *Conv* i 1, iii 6, iv 12, *Purg* xxi 1, *Par* ii 19, xxviii 106 100, etc

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CANTO III is not because they are blown about by hurricanes, or plunged in rivers of blood, or frozen in lakes of ice, that the dark underworld reverberates with cries and lamentations. These, and such as these, are only material figures to shadow forth the different forms of pain their special sins produce, but the essential suffering common to them all is that unsatisfied thirst for the knowledge of God, the 'good of the intellect,' which they have foregone for ever. For Dante's deepest conviction is that man was made with 'a concreated and perpetual thirst' for the knowledge of God, and that when by his sin he foregoes that knowledge, the thirst only rages on the more violently, and what was meant to be an eternal bliss becomes an eternal pain.

**Vestibule of
the Neutrals**

Assured, then, that he was not of the number of those who had 'lost the good of intellect,' Dante ventures to pass through the Gate, and finds himself not in Hell proper, but in a kind of Vestibule or Ante-Hell, where his ears are assailed by so dreadful a Babel of cries that he feels the horror of it tighten like a circle round his head

There sighs, complaints, and ululations loud
Resounded through the air without a star,
Whence I, at the beginning, wept thereat
Languages diverse, horrible dialects,
Accents of anger, words of agony,
And voices high and hoarse, with sound of hands,
Made up a tumult, that goes whirling on
For ever in that air for ever dark,
Even as the sand doth when the whirlwind breathes¹

Peering through the darkened air, Dante perceives

¹ *Inf.* III 22 30

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a multitude so vast he had not thought 'that ever death so many had undone,' carried on like sand before the whirlwind, in pursuit of a flying banner, which 'seemed indignant of all pause' These naked wretches were so stung by hornets and wasps that their faces streamed with blood, which mingled with their tears and was gathered at their feet by loathsome worms They are the souls of men who lived without praise or blame, because they never boldly and generously took a side—moral cowards and neutrals Mingled with them are 'that caitiff choir of angels,' who, in the great war in Heaven, stood aloof and waited the event—neither for God nor against Him, but only for themselves For this moral neutrality, Dante had an intense and noble scorn.¹ He denies it the name of life 'they never were alive', and Virgil says contemptuously

'Let us not speak of them, but look and pass'

Probably Dante had known many such in the troubled politics of Florence—men who never boldly took a side and held to it, but like cowards and time-servers followed the banner of the majority of the moment The breed has not died out yet.

The general conception of their punishment is plain enough that spirit of time-serving Neutrality in which they lived on earth has grown into the eternal habit of the soul There as here they are swept on the wind of public opinion, without minds

¹ In *De Mon* i 1 Dante says he wrote this book lest some day he should have to answer the charge of the talent buried in the earth In *Purg* xxii 89-93, the poet Statius for his lukewarmness in not confessing Christianity after his baptism was detained more than 400 years on the Terrace of Sloth

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CANTO III or wills of their own. There as here they follow whatever banner has the crowd behind it. It is a banner not simply '*disdainful* of all pause,' as it is usually translated, but '*unworthy* of all pause,' as the word literally means. The idea plainly is that such men never follow the banner of any worthy cause,—any banner worthy to be set up permanently as a standard round which brave men may rally. And then Dante shows us by a series of minute touches, every one of which tells, the great horror of weary, empty, barren existence to which this cowardly Neutrality leads,—an eternity of trimming, of having no great moral cause to which to devote the soul. The sand to which he compares them is the symbol of their barrenness: such men produce nothing. They are naked, on earth they carefully donned the garb of their party for the moment: now every party disguise is stripped off. Here one of their chief aims was, by following the popular banner, to avoid the stings of hostile criticism and of adverse fortune, now they are stung by every wasp and hornet. Here they shed neither tears nor blood for any great and worthy cause, there they do indeed shed both, but still for no great and worthy cause: the blood and tears of such cowards are worthy only to be the food of loathsome worms, the symbols of corruption and decay. They whose aim had been to stand well with all, to have a good name and fame, are now rejected and forgotten of all.

'No fame of them the world permits to be'

Heaven and Hell alike reject them—Heaven, to keep itself free from stain; Hell, 'lest the damned should

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gain some glory from them,' the glory probably of triumphing over cowards who had not even the courage to sin boldly. Such souls are of no use for either Heaven or Hell, for God's work or the devil's. Some use can be made of a man who boldly takes a side for good or for evil, but absolutely nothing can be made of one who is a mere trimmer and time-server. Hence these Neutrals are, we may say, of necessity rejected of both Hell and Heaven. 'So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth' ¹

And all this it is that constitutes their eternal misery. The ancient habit of following the crowd forces them still to pursue some worthless cause. But all the illusions and disguises of earth are stripped away, and they are compelled to feel the empty, weary, barren worthlessness of a soul that never yielded itself to any great moral enthusiasm, never was swept out of itself by genuine devotion to a cause, either good or bad. At last, when it is too late, they understand the utter baseness of such an attitude of soul, though they cannot now escape from it. The misery of it is so great that anything, even death, would be welcomed.

'These people have not any hope of death,
And this blind life of theirs is so debased,
They envious are of every other fate' ²

Such is the awful weariness and self-contempt which fall on souls that have no moral ideals or enthusiasms.

One only of these caitiff souls is singled out for 'The great refusal'

¹ Rev iii 16

² Inf iii 46-48

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CANTO III mention, but, in accordance with that law of their
punishment which permits no fame of them on earth,
his name is withheld

When some among them I had recognized,
I looked, and I beheld the shade of him
Who made through cowardice the great refusal ¹

Vieri de'
Cerchi

This nameless shade has called forth a multitude of conjectures. Those who connect it with the ruin of Dante's own fortunes identify it with either Vieri de' Cerchi or Pope Celestine v. The former was the leader of the White Guelphs in Florence, and it is possible that Dante regarded his exile as due to his cowardly refusal to fight Dean Church, indeed, thinks that the Whites were the originals of this picture of the Neutrals. 'They were upstarts, purse-proud, vain, and coarse-minded, and they dared to aspire to an ambition which they were too dull and cowardly to pursue, when the game was in their hands. They wished to rule, but when they might, they were afraid. The commons were on their side, the moderate men, the party of law, the lovers of republican government, and for the most part the magistrates, but they shrank from their fortune, "more from cowardice than from goodness, because they exceedingly feared their adversaries".'² The common view, however, identifies this shade with Celestine v. In the year 1294, Peter, a hermit in the mountain of Morrone in the Abruzzi, was elected Pope in Perugia, and for five months occupied the Papal chair, under the name of Celestine. He then resigned. 'In the formal instrument of his renun-

Celestine v

¹ *Inf* iii 58 60

² Church's *Dante*, pp 44, 45

ciation, he recites as the causes moving him to the step, "the desire for humility, for a purer life, for a stainless conscience, the deficiencies of his own physical strength, his ignorance, the perverseness of the people, his longing for the tranquillity of his former life" Probably this last reason played no inconsiderable part in his abdication the sudden wrench from the solitary habits of a life-time became intolerable, and he was only too glad to escape to the quiet of his mountain retreat. The Church chose to regard it as an act of saintly humility, and Celestine was canonized in 1313 It was the popular belief, in which Dante shared, that the abdication was brought about by Cardinal Gaetani in order to procure his own election This is the Pope known to us under the name of Boniface VIII, on whom Dante pours the full vials of his wrath. He regarded him as one of the greatest enemies of both Church and State, to his invitation to Charles of Valois to enter Florence he traced his own exile and the ruin of his fortunes, and he may well have scorned the coward-hermit whose 'great refusal' of the Papacy threw the power into hands which proved so unworthy to wield it.¹ If Celestine is meant, it is significant that the first soul mentioned in Hell is that of a canonized Pope. It is true, the decree of canonization was not published till 1328, when Dante was dead, but had it been published in his life-time, he would assuredly have allowed it to make no change in his verdict on a man whom he regarded as guilty of a

¹ Reference to his fraudulent seizing of the Papacy is made in *Inf* xix 52-57, where Boniface is consigned by anticipation to the Moat of the Simoniacs See pp 278-280

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CANTO III cowardly betrayal of the most sacred interests of
— both Church and Empire

Pilate Among Scriptural conjectures we have Esau who sold his birthright, the young man of the Gospels who 'went away sorrowful,' and the Roman Governor, Pilate. This last conjecture, made by Dr Schaff, has so much to recommend it that it is strange it has not received more attention. Pilate, as Dr. Schaff says, 'was perfectly convinced of the innocence of Christ, but from cowardice and fear of losing his place, refused to do Him justice and surrendered Him to the bloodthirsty design of the Jewish hierarchy—the basest act a judge could commit. Of all men in biblical or ecclesiastical history, Pilate was the fittest representative of a cowardly and selfish neutrality'¹ This argument is greatly strengthened by other considerations. The crucifixion of Christ naturally filled Dante's mind this Good Friday night. We shall find the other actors in that great tragedy in various parts of Hell. Caiaphas and the Counsellors lie crucified in the Moat of the Hypocrites, and Judas writhes in the central mouth of Lucifer. Pilate we find nowhere, and it would certainly be strange if so prominent an agent in the crucifixion were allotted no place in the *Inferno*. The man who washed his hands of all moral responsibility at the very moment when he was making 'the great refusal' to deliver Christ from His enemies, certainly deserves a place in this Vestibule of cowards and trimmers. There is one passage, indeed, which seems at first glance decisive against this interpretation. In Canto

¹ Philip Schaff, D D, *Literature and Poetry*, p. 380

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vi. of the *Paradiso*, Dante sets forth a view of the CANTO III
 crucifixion so extraordinary that it is difficult to
 imagine any Christian man holding it. After re-
 counting the great and glorious achievements of the Dante's view
of the
Crucifixion
 Roman Eagle, he says they must all pale before the
 glory of what took place under 'the third Cæsar,'
 Tiberius. This crowning glory of the Roman Eagle,
 marvellous to say, is the crucifixion of our Lord.
 From the Divine side that crucifixion was 'venge-
 ance of the ancient sin,' the greatest act of God's
 justice, on which hung the salvation of the world.¹
 In the *De Monarchia*, Dante argues that 'if the
 Roman Empire did not exist by right, the sin of
 Adam was not punished in Christ.' For 'punish-
 ment is not merely penalty inflicted on him who has
 done wrong, but that penalty inflicted by one who
 has penal jurisdiction. If, therefore, Christ had
 not suffered by the sentence of a regular judge, the
 penalty would not properly have been punishment,
 and none could be a regular judge who had not
 jurisdiction over all mankind, for all mankind was
 punished in the flesh of Christ. . . And if the
 Roman Empire had not existed by right, Tiberius
 Cæsar, whose viceroy was Pontius Pilate, would not
 have had jurisdiction over all mankind,' and there-
 fore the Atonement would have been invalid.² To
 us, of course, the argument is absurd or worse, but,
 such as it is, Miss Rossetti thinks it is 'probably the
 key to a perplexing problem—why Pontius Pilate is
 nowhere met with in Hell.'³ The conclusion, how-

¹ *Par.* vi. 82-93

² *De Mon.* ii. 13

³ *A Shadow of Dante*, p. 223

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CANTO III

 ever, is by no means inevitable. Dante was accustomed to distinguish between the man and his office; it would be entirely after his manner to acquit Pilate as the lawful representative of the Emperor, and condemn him as an individual. As a matter of fact, this is precisely what he has done. It is true, the condemnation is indirect, but it is none the less severe. In *Purg.* xx. 86-93, he draws a parallel between the crucifixion of Christ and the outrage on His vicar, Boniface VIII, at Anagni, in which Philip the Fair of France is 'the new Pilate'

' I see the fleur-de-lys Alagna enter,
And Christ in his own vicar captive made
I see him yet another time denied,
I see renewed the vinegar and the gall,
And between living thieves I see him slain
I see the new Pilate so relentless,
This doth not sate him, but without decree
He bears his greedy sails into the temple,'—

the reference in the last three lines being to Philip's cruel persecution of the Order of Templars. These words could never have been written had Dante regarded Pontius Pilate merely as an upright judge lawfully fulfilling the duties of his office. They certainly justify the suggestion that he is the man who made 'the great refusal,' the coward neutral who was unworthy of a place even in Hell

CHAPTER IV

CIRCLE I —THE LIMBO OF THE UNBAPTIZED

PASSING the coward Neutrals with one contemptuous CANTO IV
glance, Dante sees through the dim air a great crowd
upon a river bank Wondering who they are, and The River
why they seem so eager to cross over,¹ he ventures Acheron.
to ask his guide, but Virgil rebukes his curiosity,
bidding him restrain it until he reaches 'the sad
shore of Acheron' It is not easy to understand the
reason for this rebuke, which makes Dante pass on
in silence and with eyes downcast and ashamed
Perhaps the intention is to discourage all undue
curiosity concerning the dead. it will be time
enough to know when we reach the dark river our-
selves. When they come within sight of Acheron,
Dante sees Charon, the 'grim ferryman' of Death, Charon.
approaching in his boat—an old man with hoary
hair He corresponds perhaps in the *Inferno* to
Cato in the *Purgatorio*; only that, whereas Cato's
face shone like the sun with the light of the four
holy stars, Charon is a demon whose eyes are circled
round with 'wheels of flame.'² It represents the

¹ Probably the eagerness is due partly to the stings of a guilty conscience, and partly to the natural longing to know the worst

² Rather Charon corresponds to the Angel Pilot of Purgatory, the white 'bird divine' who, unlike Charon, needs no 'human arguments' of sail or oar (*Purg* ii 31 33)

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CANTO IV — look of fiery terror which Death bears to wicked and impenitent souls. To the crowd upon the bank Charon cries 'Woe!' and terrifies them with anticipations of their hopeless doom; but when he sees Dante, he orders him away because he is 'a living soul' This may mean, as some think, little more than that he is still in the flesh, but from his further words, when he saw that Dante refused to withdraw, it is obvious that Charon had a deeper meaning

'By other ways, by other ports,
Thou to the shore shalt come, not here, for passage,
A lighter vessel needs must carry thee'¹

The other ways and ports are clearly those which lead to Purgatory, and the lighter vessel that which needed no sail or oar beyond the white wings of its Angel-Pilot Dante tells us that all the souls not destined for Hell gather at the mouth of the Tiber, to await there their passage across the sea to the Mount of Purification on their way to Paradise² Charon's meaning therefore is that Dante is 'a living soul' in the spiritual sense, not, like the others, 'dead in trespasses and sins,' and that Paradise is his ultimate destination

**The Crowd of
Lost Souls**

With a few sharp words Virgil rebukes the churlishness of Charon, telling him that Dante's journey is divinely ordered The demon thereupon turns furiously on the crowd of weary, naked souls, gathering them together, and beating with his oar those who lag behind—just as you may see him doing in Michael Angelo's great picture of the Last Judg-

¹ *Inf* iii 91-93

² *Purg* ii 100-105

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ment in the Sistine Chapel in Rome : except, indeed, **CANTO IV**
that there he is beating the souls out of the boat,
when they reach the other side of the river. The
description of the agony of these lost souls is very
terrible .

But those souls who weary were and naked,
Their colour changed and gnashed their teeth together,
As soon as they had heard the cruel words
God they blasphemed and their progenitors,
The human race, the place, the time, the seed
Of their engendering and of their birth !
Thereafter all together they withdrew,
Bitterly weeping, to the accursed shore,
Which waiteth every man who fears not God ¹

It is, indeed, the instinct of hard and impenitent
souls to cast the blame of their sins on others—God,
their parents, their fellow-men, yet Dante saw clearly
that another instinct—that of Divine Justice—goads
them on to meet their doom

' And ready are they to pass o'er the river,
Because Divine Justice sputs them on,
So that their fear is turned into desire ' ²

And then, one by one in that last loneliness of
dying, like dead leaves in autumn, the dead souls
cast themselves into the boat, which then departs
upon its awful voyage, and ere ever it reaches
the far side, a new troop assembles on the river
bank.

In this narrative there are several matters with **River System**
which it will be well to acquaint ourselves before **of Hell.**
proceeding further. The first is the River-System
of the Inferno According to Dante, Hell is drained

¹ *Inf* iii 100-108

² *Inf* iii 124-126

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CANTO IV by four great rivers taken from heathen mythology, but filled with symbolic meanings of his own.¹ The first is this Acheron on the bank of which he stands—the River of Death in all its senses. The other three are connected symbolically with the three great moral sections into which the Inferno is divided. The River Styx gathers into a stagnant marsh at the bottom of the highest section, which contains the sins of Incontinence, and the sad and sullen are immersed in its miry waters,—perhaps to indicate that sullen, lifeless melancholy in which sins of the flesh so often plunge those who indulge in them. The symbolism of the remaining two, Phlegethon and Cocytus, has been rightly divined by Ruskin as indicating the distinction between sins committed in hot blood and in cold blood.² Phlegethon is a river of blood which flows through the central infernal region of Violence, to mark that the sins here are those of hot-blooded passion. The lowest river is Cocytus, which forms a lake of ice. Here are punished sins of cold-blooded treachery—treachery being, in Dante's view, the freezing up of all right feeling in the human soul.

Source of the
Rivers

Perhaps at this point also it may be well to anticipate somewhat the mystical account which Dante gives in Canto XIV of the source of these four rivers. There Virgil informs him that on Mount Ida in Crete,

¹ In *Æneid* vi the same rivers appear, but are much less carefully distinguished from each other. Comp. *Phædo*, 113, 114.

² *Fors Clavigera*, Letter xxiii p. 21, 'The injurious sins, done in hot blood—that is to say, under the influence of passion—are in the midmost hell, but the sins done in cold blood, without passion, or, more accurately, contrary to passion, far down below the freezing point, are put in the lowest hell—the Ninth Circle.'

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‘once glad with waters and with leaves,’ but now CANTO IV
 ‘deserted as a thing outworn,’ stands ‘a great Old Man’—the Image of Time. His head is of gold; his arms and breast of silver, his trunk of brass; and from the fork downward he is iron, with the exception of the right foot, which is clay. The symbolism of this must be more carefully examined when we reach the passage, in the meantime it is enough to note that with the exception of the golden head, which represents the golden age, each part is cleft by a fissure through which the tears of the human race drip into a cavern, and thence fall into the abyss of Hell, forming its rivers

‘From rock to rock they fall into this valley,
 Acheron, Styx, and Phlegethon, they form,
 Then downward go along this narrow sluice
 Unto that point where is no more descending,
 They form Cocytus’¹

The idea seems to be that at first these tears of Time form Acheron, further down Acheron changes into the miry marsh of Styx, this marsh is then drained into the Circle of the Violent, where it becomes red with blood, and is named Phlegethon; and finally, Phlegethon falls into the lowest Hell and forms the frozen Lake of Cocytus, the cesspool of all the sorrows of the sinful world. Even this does not complete the symbolism. When the two pilgrims reach the central depth of Hell and pass out on the other side into the narrow passage which leads up to the shores of Purgatory, they find another stream meeting them—probably Lethe, the sins of

¹ *Inf* xlv 115 119

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CANTO IV all the souls upon the Mount, forgiven and forgotten,
 seeking once more their Satanic source.¹

Guardians of
 the Circles

As Acheron has suggested this explanation of the River-System of Hell, so its grim Ferryman gives us the opportunity of making some inquiry concerning the Guardians or Jailors under whose charge Dante has placed the eternal prison-house. These too he has taken from heathen mythology. Charon may be regarded as the Guardian of the First Circle, or perhaps of the whole pit, since he is the symbol of Death, physical and moral. The Second Circle is guarded by Minos, King of Crete, who became in mythology one of the judges of the shades in Hades. Dante degrades him from his royal dignity into a snarling dog-demon with a tail. The use of this tail seems to us grotesque. As each soul appears before him confessing his sin, Minos girds himself with his tail as many times as the degrees he is to be thrust down in the Inferno, and straightway the wretch is hurled to his own Circle. Minos is thus the symbol of the condemning power of guilty conscience, 'a type of the sinner's disordered and terrified conception of Justice', but the other Guardians simply represent the various sins. Cerberus is the symbol of Gluttony, Plutus of Avarice, Phlegyas of Wrath, the Furies and the Medusa of Heresy; the Minotaur of Violence, Geryon of Fraud, and the Giants of Treachery.

This introduction of Pagan myths into a Christian

¹ *Inf* xxxiv 127-132. Virgil assigns Lethe to Elysium, just as Dante sets it in the Earthly Paradise. *Comp. Paradise Lost*, bk. II 570-614, where Milton places Lethe far from the other rivers of Hell, and tantalizes the lost with the sight of its waters of which they can never drink.

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poem is due to something more than the influence of Dante's half-converted age. It is true that in his day and for long after, this mingling of Christian and heathen elements was very common. Our Lord Himself, for example, is represented as Orpheus with his lute in the Catacomb of St Callixtus; and in the Baptistry of Ravenna the river-god of the Jordan is introduced into an ancient mosaic of His baptism. Long after Dante's day, Michael Angelo on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel painted the heathen Sibyls side by side with the Old Testament prophets. In short, this mingling was characteristic of the age, and undoubtedly in the days of the Renaissance meant the degradation of Christianity toward the level of Paganism¹. But it is far otherwise in the *Commedia*. In the myths of heathenism Dante gladly recognized the ethical truths which the natural heart had been able to reach without the aid of any special revelation. They were to him and to the best thought of his age no mere blind and meaningless fantasies. He could have adopted the words of a modern poet concerning them

'How should any hold
Those precious scriptures only old-world tales
Of strange impossible torments and false gods,

¹ In *The Bishop orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church* Rome 15—, Browning shows imitably the mingling of Pagan and Christian elements in the Renaissance. The dying Bishop gives instructions to his 'nephews' concerning his tomb:

'The bas relief in bronze ye promised me,
Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and perchance
Some tripod, thyrsus, with a vase or so,
The Saviour at his sermon on the mount,
Saint Praxed in a glory, and one Pan
Ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off,
And Moses with the tables'

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CANTO IV

Of men and monsters in some brainless dream,
Coherent, yet unmeaning, linked together
By some false skein of song? Nay! evermore,
All things and thoughts, both new and old, are writ
Upon the unchanging human heart and soul '1

Dante saw in Pagan mythology a revelation of God written on the natural heart and conscience,—a revelation, not indeed of salvation, but of sin and its awful, inevitable issues. The monsters of mythology become, therefore, in his hands dread symbols of the sins possible to human nature, whether Christian or pre-Christian, and as such he makes them Guardians or Jailors of the various Circles of Hell. In this way he entirely subordinates the heathen element to the Christian Faith. The mythical personages are reduced to mere officials of Hell, some of them are demonized, like Minos, who snarls like a dog. In short, this mythological element is neither a mere grotesque embroidery on the poem, nor the sign of a mind still half-Pagan. It indicates two things: first, the amount of ethical truth attained by the natural Reason, and second, the entire subordination of that truth to the Christian Revelation.

Limbo of the Unbaptized

To resume the narrative, there is much discussion among commentators as to the mode in which Dante crossed Acheron. It seems certain that Charon refused him passage. Possibly, as many think, he was carried over by an angel; but no hint of this is given. All he himself says is that 'the tearful ground' gave forth a wind, and that the wind flashed forth a

¹ Lewis Morris, *Epic of Hades*

THE LIMBO OF THE UNBAPTIZED 69

crimson light which so overpowered him that he fell to the earth in a trance.¹ He was roused on the other side of the River by a heavy thunder—probably the loud lamentations of the lost. In all likelihood, his intention is to indicate the mystery and terror with which the soul makes its first close acquaintance with the disastrous wreck and ruin produced by defiance of Divine Law. From the giving of that Law on Mount Sinai down through the judgment-days of the Apocalypse, we have the same terror of ‘fire, and blackness, and darkness, and tempest’, and doubtless all this was before Dante’s mind²

When he awakes, he finds himself in a ‘blind world’—‘a land of darkness as darkness itself . . . where the light is as darkness’ Even his Guide becomes all pale, and this Dante mistakes for a sign of terror. Virgil, however, assures him that the cause is not fear, but pity for the lost. All through the *Inferno* there goes on a kind of struggle between Dante’s heart and his reason as represented by Virgil. At times even Reason grows pale with pity for the sorrows of the lost, at other times it rebukes pity, declaring it to be rebellion against the Justice of God. It is quite possible, however, that Virgil’s pity has reference only to this First Circle, to which he himself belonged; and certainly, if ever pity might be permitted, it is here. For its inhabitants are not sinners in the ordinary sense. Properly speaking, indeed, this First Circle is not Hell so much as its Limbo or Hem, and its inhabitants are the

CANTO IV

The Virtuous
Heathen.

¹ *Inf* iii 130-136

² *Inf* iv 1-3

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CANTO IV Virtuous Heathen and Unbaptized Infants. Of the former Virgil says ·

‘Now will I have thee know, ere thou go farther,
That they sinned not, and if they merit have,
’Tis not enough, because they had not baptism,
Which is the portal of the Faith thou holdest,
And if they were before Christianity,
In the right manner they adored not God,
And among such as these am I myself
For such defects, and not for other guilt,
Lost are we, and only so far are punished,
That without hope we live on in desire ’¹

In the *Purgatorio* we are told that they practised the four Cardinal Virtues, but Faith, Hope, and Love, the three Theological Virtues necessary for salvation, were unknown to them² Virgil, in reply to a question of Dante’s, tells him that soon after his own arrival in this Limbo ‘a Mighty One with sign of victory crowned’ came and rescued many, among whom he names ‘the First Parent,’ Abel, Noah, Moses, Abraham, David, Israel, with his father, his sons, and his wife Rachel These were the first human spirits saved.’³

Unbaptized
infants

It is strange to find that Dante is absolutely silent concerning the Infants; although in the *Purgatorio* he speaks of them pityingly as

‘the little innocents
Bitten by the teeth of death, or ever they
Were from our human sinfulness exempt’⁴—

that is, before their original sin had been washed away by the waters of Christian baptism. Without

¹ *Inf* iv 33-42

² *Inf* iv 52-63

³ *Purg* vii 34-36

⁴ *Purg* vii 31-33

THE LIMBO OF THE UNBAPTIZED 71

doubt he accepted the merciful view of his master in theology, St Thomas Aquinas, that such infants are simply excluded from Paradise and suffer no pain even of loss. 'as they are not made capable of possessing the vision of God, they no more grieve for its loss than a bird does that it is not an emperor or a king. Moreover, though not united to God in glory, they are joined to Him by the share they possess of natural goods, and are able to rejoice in Him by natural knowledge and love'.¹ It is perhaps for this reason that Aquinas places infants in a separate Limbo. In the *Paradiso*, the lower half of the snow-white Rose is occupied by redeemed children, the little 'folk who hastened to the true life'.²

Advancing in the gloom 'through the forest of thick-crowded ghosts'—undistinguished souls that called for no special mention—they soon descried 'a fire which conquered a hemisphere of darkness', and on nearer approach Dante perceived that 'honourable people held the place.' The light came from 'a noble castle,' and represents the wisdom, learning, and virtue of its inhabitants. Four of them meet the pilgrims and escort them inside the castle walls—Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan. in Dante's view, along with Virgil the greatest poets of the ancient world. As they move towards the light they discourse of things as becoming to speak of there, says Dante, as not to speak of here—either praises of himself, or, more probably, the high themes of the

The Noble
Castle

¹ Appendix to *Supplement*, q 1 a 2

² *Par* xxxii 40-84, where the conditions of their salvation are explained

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CANTO IV art of poetry. Within the castle walls, 'on the green enamel of a meadow,' they find seated the mighty spirits of antiquity

People were there with eyes slow and grave,
Of great authority in their countenance,
They spake but seldom and with gentle voices ¹

They are divided into two groups The lower of the two consists of the souls of heroes and heroines of Rome, and those from whom the Romans were descended, beginning with Electra, mother of Dardanus who founded Troy, Hector and Æneas, and 'Cæsar in armour with gerfalcon eyes' Among them we may note Marcia, Cato's wife ² Cato himself, though a heathen and a suicide, is chosen by Dante as the Guardian of Mount Purgatory One soul sits apart by himself—Saladin, the great Sultan, who was defeated by Richard Cœur-de-Lion in the Crusades. His mercy in sparing Christian prisoners made him the type to Europe of Oriental magnanimity and generosity In the *Convito* (iv. 11) Dante holds him up as an example of 'munificence' He sits alone as having no connection with the Empire, or, perhaps, as being of another race and faith Raising his brows, Dante sees the second and higher group, composed of the great philosophers and men of science of the ancient world, or, speaking more strictly, of the non-Christian world Their chief is

¹ *Inf* iv. 112-114 Comp the slow movement of Sordello's eyes in *Purg* vi. 63

² In *Conv.* iv. 28, she is taken as symbolic of the soul returning to God The passage is very curious and difficult to harmonize with this In *Purg* i. 78-90, Virgil tells Cato that his Marcia still prays him to hold her for his own, but Cato replies that she no longer moves him

THE LIMBO OF THE UNBAPTIZED 73

Aristotle, 'Master of those who know,' on whom all gaze with honour; he is Dante's own principal authority on all ethical questions. Nearer him than the rest stand Socrates and Plato. It is difficult to understand why Dante makes so little use of Plato, 'whose idealism,' as Plumptre says, 'was more in harmony with Dante's mind than the more formal system of Aristotle'¹. Probably the reason is that his knowledge of Plato was confined to the *Timæus*, and to the references scattered throughout Aristotle, Albertus Magnus, and his pupil Aquinas. After these come Democritus, Diogenes, and many another, down to Averroes, who made 'the great Comment' on Aristotle. The list, as Plumptre remarks, throws light on Dante's preferences in poetry, history, and philosophy, just as the two Circles of Theologians in the Heaven of the Sun tell us his favourite authors in theology.

It is worth while pausing to notice with what serene confidence Dante claims kinship with these mighty spirits of the past. We saw that they were met outside the castle walls by those who were undoubtedly, along with his Guide, in Dante's regard the four greatest shades—Homer and Horace, Ovid and Lucan—their leader, Homer, bearing a sword in token of the warlike nature of his song. These four welcome Virgil back, hailing him as 'the loftiest Poet'. And then turning to Dante with sign of salutation, they greet him as a brother of the guild.

¹ 'Dante was a mystic with a very practical turn of mind. A Platonist by nature, an Aristotelian by training, his feet keep closely to the narrow path of dialectics, because he believed it the safest, while his eyes are fixed on the stars' (Lowell's *Essay on Dante*).

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CANTO IV

And more of honour still, much more, they did me,
In that they made me one of their own band,
So that I was a sixth 'mid so much wisdom¹

At first reading, this gives perhaps the impression of pride or vanity. Dante, we think, has too well learnt the Aristotelian virtue of Magnanimity, and travelled far from the modesty which, only a few hours before, oppressed him with a sense of his unfitness. In reality his estimate of himself here has turned out to be too humble. It will always, of course, be possible to take different views of Dante's rank as a poet. Ruskin will call him 'the central man of all the world, as representing in perfect balance the imaginative, moral, and intellectual faculties, all at their highest';² while Savage Landor, after ranking Homer with Milton, will declare that 'Dante is no more the equal of Homer than Hercules is the equal of Apollo'.³ But amidst all such differences, no one dreams of setting Dante on the level of Horace, or Ovid, or Lucan, or even Virgil. When, for example, Dr Moore tells us that, after Virgil, the poets most frequently quoted are Ovid and Lucan, it almost makes us suspect the soundness of Dante's literary judgment. Assuredly he did himself scant justice when he ranked himself with such men, instead of being one of six, he is one of three, and the names of the other two are not difficult to conjecture.⁴ Perhaps, however, Dante's intention in

¹ *Inf.* iv 100-102 ² *Stones of Venice*, III iii 67 ³ *Pentameron*

⁴ 'This is he who among literary fames finds only two that for growth and immutability can parallel his own. The suffrages of highest authority would now place him second in that company where he with proud humility took the sixth place' (Russell Lowell's *Dante*)

THE LIMBO OF THE UNBAPTIZED 75

the passage was to assert his standing as a poet against the contempt and depreciation of his own countrymen. We know that, almost to the last, it was his hope that Florence would receive him back into her fold and give him the poet's crown at his baptismal font in his 'beautiful St John,'¹ but it was not to be. Against this cruel injustice he here appeals let the Florentines refuse him the laureas they may, the great poets of antiquity will greet him as their peer

We come now to the subject of greatest interest in the passage,—Dante's view of the heathen world and its fate. As a good Catholic he accepts in the main the teaching of the Church, that faith in Christ and baptism are essential to salvation, but he accepts it with the utmost reluctance and grief, knowing that it excludes many great and noble souls from Paradise. If, however, his creed thus forces him to shut them out, we cannot but mark how light by comparison is the punishment he assigns them, and how many the alleviations of their pain. Strictly speaking, they are not in Hell proper at all, but in its Limbo or 'Border.' So far as he can hear, there are no cries and lamentations such as assail his ears lower down 'only sighs made tremulous the eternal air' Their sorrow has no element of torment in it. 'Without hope they live on in desire'—the desire to see God, which is destined never to be gratified. But to the wisest and noblest of them, Dante gives what alleviations he can. The noble castle with its luminous hemisphere has without doubt a symbolic mean-

Lightness of
the Punish-
ment

¹ *Par* xxv 19

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CANTO IV ing, which we must examine presently; but to my own mind it is a pity we cannot retain the simple natural sense Remember how, as we descend from Circle to Circle, one of the chief punishments seems to be the increasing loss of the light and joy and peace of Nature The wind buffets the Sensual; the rain pours down incessantly on the Gluttons, the souls of the Sullen in Styx bewail the loss of 'the sweet air made gladsome by the sun' Far down, a wretch in the burning thirst of dropsy is but more deeply tortured by the memory of

'The rivulets, that from the verdant hills
Of Casentino descend into the Arno,
Making their channel-courses cool and soft'¹

They have lost it all for ever, the beauteous world, with its joyous sunshine, its meadows of deep green grass, its fair-flowing rivers Might it not then seem to Dante one of the greatest consolations of these noble spirits of antiquity that something of the ancient joy of Nature should be left to them, the memory of its beauty and its peace—light which conquered a hemisphere of darkness, a fair rivulet, and the green enamel of the meadow?

When, however, we turn to the symbolism which the passage undoubtedly contains, we find in it even greater alleviations of their fate The noble castle represents the Philosophy or Natural Wisdom attained by the sages and heroes who had no light of Revelation In short, it represents precisely the same thing as Virgil does, for this castle is his home in the eternal world The seven walls are seven of

¹ *Inf* xvv 64-66

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the ten virtues possible to man. These St. Thomas Aquinas divides into three great classes—the intellectual, the moral, and the theological. The last, Faith, Hope, and Love, are supernatural, because they are beyond man's natural powers, hence, as Virgil afterwards tells Dante, the inhabitants of Limbo cannot know them. But the remaining seven are virtues possible to the natural man—the intellectual—Wisdom, Science, and Understanding, and the moral, which are also called cardinal—Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude. There is little doubt that it is these seven natural virtues which, like protecting walls, encircle the wise and heroic spirits of the ancient world. The most probable interpretation of the seven gates is that they stand for the seven liberal arts which made up the curriculum of mediæval education—the *Trivium*, consisting of Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric, and the *Quadrivium*, of Music, Arithmetic, Geometry, and Astronomy. In the *Convito* they correspond to the seven lowest Heavens¹

It is more difficult to assign a meaning to the 'fair rivulet' by which the castle is surrounded like a moat. The interpretation usually given, that it represents Eloquence, is probably the right one. Dante, for instance, applies this very figure to Virgil when he first meets him.

'Now, art thou that Virgilius, and that fountain
Which spreads abroad so wide a river of speech?'²

But when he says here that he and his poet-companions passed over this river of Speech or Elo-

¹ *Conv* ii 14

² *Inf* i 79, 80

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CANTO IV quence as on solid ground, it is not so easy to say what he means Longfellow regards it as a hint that Eloquence is not a very profound matter after all—an idea foreign, I think, to Dante's mind. So probably is the suggestion sometimes made that the wise do not need the persuasions of Eloquence to make them enter the castle of the Seven Virtues. It seems much more probable that Dante wishes to tell us of the dangers of human speech. It lies like a moat between us and wisdom, only across it can we reach the 'noble castle', but to great minds alone is it as the firm earth To others the fair river of Speech or Eloquence may prove a dangerous moat in which mind and soul sink to rise no more It is no imaginary danger 'life and death are in the power of the tongue'

The 'meadow of fresh verdure' inside the seven gates represents the fame of the great spirits whom Dante finds reposing on it If Ruskin is right, it is a fame for ever green, but also for ever dead Dante speaks of this meadow as 'the green enamel,' and Ruskin maintains that he 'did not use this phrase as we use it He knew well what enamel was, and his readers, in order to understand him thoroughly, must remember what it is,—a vitreous paste, dissolved in water, mixed with metallic oxides, to give it the opacity and the colour required, spread in a moist state on metal, and afterwards hardened by fire, so as never to change. And Dante means, in using this metaphor of the grass of the Inferno, to mark, that it is laid as a tempering and cooling substance over the dark, metallic, gloomy ground, but yet so hardened

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by the fire, that it is not any more fresh or living grass, but a smooth, silent, lifeless bed of eternal green.'¹ That Dante meant all this is more than doubtful, nevertheless, when we remember his marvellously careful use of words, it is quite improbable that 'enamel' has no special significance. He may mean to indicate that while, indeed, the fame of these great spirits is for ever fresh and green, it is at the same time lifeless as enamel not the living, growing fame which might have been theirs had their wisdom been of a higher, diviner order

Yet, such as it is, it remains to them. Dante will deprive them of nothing great or worthy that they ever possessed on earth. Even in the Inferno, their virtues, their learning, and their wisdom shed round them a hemisphere of light, they rest upon their fame as on 'a meadow of fresh verdure,' for ever green, 'with gentle voices' the glorious company carry on the eternal intercourse and commerce of mind with mind. Such are the great alleviations with which Dante solaces the wise and virtuous souls of heathendom. His theology may compel him to put them in Limbo, but he will make their place as tolerable as lies within his power. The servants who knew not their Lord's will shall be beaten with few stripes

Yet, however tolerable, it is not the Paradise of God—

‘That perfect presence of His face,
Which we, for want of words, call Heaven’

Dante's long-
ing for Salva-
tion of the
Heathen

To Dante's mind, it must have been an awful punishment to be for ever haunted by an unattainable

¹ *Modern Painters*, III 228 (Edition 1888)

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CANTO IV ideal, an eternal desire for the vision of God, doomed to eternal disappointment. Hence he makes eager inquiry whether any soul had ever been delivered from this Limbo Virgil replies, as we have seen, that when he was but a 'novice' here, 'a Mighty One' came and drew forth the First Parent, Abel, Noah, and many others ¹ But half the point of this answer is that they were all Old Testament saints no heathen shade was rescued For the moment Dante had to rest satisfied with this answer, but only for the moment Afterwards, when he has mounted to the Sixth Heaven, the abode of men famous for their justice, the problem of the Divine justice in the fate of the heathen returns upon him, as the hunger of a 'great fast' which had found no food on earth He states the question thus

' A man is born upon the bank
Of the Indus, and there is no one there to speak
Of Christ, nor none to read, nor none to write,
And all his volitions and his actions
Are good, as far as human reason sees,
Without a sin in life or in discourse
He dieth unbaptized and without faith,
Where is this justice that condemneth him?
Where is his fault, if he do not believe?' ²

So passionate is his desire for the salvation of the heathen, that he boldly breaks through the trammels of his creed so far as to set two heathen souls there in that Heaven of Just Men The first is the Emperor Trajan, who is held up in the *Purgatorio* as an example of humility. There was a curious legend that St. Gregory the Great had so fervent an admira-

The Emperor
Trajan.

¹ *Inf.* iv 52-63

² *Par.* xix 70-78

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tion for the Emperor's justice to a poor widow that by virtue of his prayers and tears he gained his release from Hell and his return 'to his bones,' as Dante puts it. He remained in them long enough to admit of his receiving Christian baptism, whereupon he was taken up to the Sixth Heaven. Dante gladly avails himself of this grotesque legend¹. The other heathen rescued from perdition is Rhipeus, whom Virgil in the *Æneid* calls the justest of the Trojans. This time, having no legend to help him, Dante takes a bolder course. It was an axiom of his creed that salvation is impossible without Faith and Baptism. how then could a heathen who lived so long before Christ be saved at all? His reply is that God gave this soul, who 'set all his love below on righteousness,' a vision of 'our redemption yet to be,' and that Faith, Hope, and Charity

CANTO IV

Rhipeus the
Trojan

'were unto him for baptism
More than a thousand years before baptizing'²

It remains a problem why Dante did not use the same means for the rescue of all the virtuous souls of the heathen world. There is certainly no reason why only two out of the great company should be saved. Indeed, there is a passage in St Thomas Aquinas which seems written for the very purpose of opening the gate of Paradise to such souls. 'God never suffers any one to want what is necessary to his salvation, if he only desires it. No one loses his soul save through his own fault, since God makes known to him truths which are essential to his

¹ *Par* xx 43-48, 106 117, *Purg* x 73 93

² *Par*, xx 67 72, 118 129, *Æneid*, ii 426, 427

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CANTO IV — salvation, either through interior revelation, or, as in the case of Cornelius, by the voice of a preacher.' ¹ It is impossible to say why Dante did not avail himself of such a passage, or how a mind like his could imagine that God would leave unsatisfied throughout eternity the desire of any human soul for that knowledge of Him which is eternal life. Yet so it is: in Heaven, as on earth, he found no food to satisfy this hunger. All he can do is to bow before the justice of God as before an impenetrable mystery, saying as the Psalmist said before him, 'Thy judgments are a great deep' the bottom of that deep near the shore the eye of man can see, but far out in mid-ocean it is invisible, yet the bottom is there too, though we perceive it not ² 'Nay but, O man, who art thou that replest against God?' 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' 'Clouds and darkness are round about him righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne'

¹ See Hettinger, 211 n

² *Par* XIX 58 66.

CHAPTER V

CIRCLE II.—THE SENSUAL

WE come now to the Second Circle of Hell—the first CANTO V
in which any positive sin is punished. The sin is ^{Incontinence}
Sensuality, or Luxury in the mediæval sense of that ^{its various}
word; and in order to understand why it is placed ^{forms}
here at the top as the least heinous, it may be
well to remind ourselves of Dante's classification
of sins already referred to. He divides sins into
two great classes: Incontinence and Malice. To this
uppermost section of the Inferno he assigns the sins
of Incontinence in four or possibly five Circles,
deepening, and also narrowing, according to their
guilt. They are set here in the highest section
because they are sins of mere want of self-control—
sins of the individual man against the various parts
of his own life and nature, by excess or defect. If
he cannot control his bodily appetites and passions,
we have the sins of Sensuality and Gluttony, as in
Circles II and III. If he cannot control his goods, we
have the twin-sins of Miserliness and Prodigality,
which, being ethically the same, are placed together
in Circle IV. Passing deeper into the man, if he
cannot control his spirits and temper, we have the
twofold sin of Anger, an excess of temper, and sullen
Sadness, a defect of it, and these occupy Circle v.

CANTO V We shall see that Circle VI is one of transition between upper and nether Hell, having relations to both, meantime we may regard it as the last of the sins of Incontinence, namely Heresy—the lack of the due control of the Reason. Thus we see in this classification Incontinence entering step by step into the deeper parts of human nature, beginning with the bodily appetites, it eats inward until the intellectual faculties are involved. According to Dante, the lusts of the mind sink men to a deeper perdition than those of the flesh. Separated from these by a great precipice are the sins of the lower Hell—Malice in its three principal forms, Violence, Fraud, and Treachery. While Incontinence is only the abuse of some normal power of human nature, and therefore for the most part an injury to the sinner himself, Malice is a social sin, having injury to others for its very end, and therefore ‘wins’ greater ‘hate in Heaven.’¹

Minos, the
Judge of Hell
Symbol of Evil
Conscience

The Guardian of this Second Circle is Minos. As a rule, the Warder of each Circle represents the sin which is punished in it, but Minos is an exception. Though he stands at the entrance to the Circle of Sensuality, he is not a symbol of that sin. He is the Judge of Hell in general, and represents the condemning power of an evil and guilty conscience. Every lost soul is compelled to appear before him and confess all his sins, whereupon Minos coils his tail round himself as many times as the number of the Circle to which he is to be thrust down, and immediately the guilty wretch is hurled to his place.

¹ *Inf* xi 22-30

As already pointed out, Dante has changed Minos into a dog-demon with a tail CANTO V

There standeth Minos horribly, and snarls ¹

The change must be deliberate and intentional, for Dante cannot have been ignorant of the noble and radiant figure of the Minos of mythology. Originally a king and lawgiver of Crete, he is rewarded for his righteousness by being made the supreme Judge in Hades. Plato tells us that Zeus appointed Rhadamanthus judge of the dead from Asia, and Æacus of the dead from Europe, 'but to Minos I shall give the primacy, and he shall hold a court of appeal, in case either of the two others are in doubt.' All have sceptres, 'but Minos alone has a golden sceptre and is seated looking on, as Odysseus in Homer declares that he saw him

"Holding a sceptre of gold, and giving laws to the dead" ²

In the *Æneid* he is the judge of those condemned to death by false accusations, and although not royal as in Homer, is yet a grave and dignified figure ³. Why, then, has Dante degraded Minos into a monstrous and demonic form? Partly, doubtless, in obedience to the belief of his time that the beings of heathen mythology were not gods, as their worshippers thought, but demons, in accordance with Paul's words 'The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God.'⁴ But there can be little doubt that the principal reason is the one already stated. Dante wanted a symbol of

¹ *Inf* v 4

³ *Æneid*, vi 430-433

² *Gorgias*, 524-526

⁴ *1 Cor* x 20

CANTO V — the evil conscience of the lost, a figure which would represent the horrible and distorted conception of the justice of God, which is one of the chief punishments of the hardened and impenitent soul. That this is the idea is evident when we compare Minos with the Angel who fulfils the same office of confessor at the Gate of St Peter in the *Purgatorio*. He too is the symbol of Conscience, but of Conscience humbled, convicted, contrite. Such a conscience sees the justice of God not as a demon but an angel—an angel, indeed, whose face cannot be endured, and whose sword flashes with a blinding light, but still an angel¹. To the impenitent and despairing conscience, the same Divine justice appears a hideous demon, which turns on the sinner with cynical snarlings of contempt and fury.

When Dante appears before him, Minos 'leaves the act of so great an office' that is, he passes no judgment on him as on the others. In other words, Dante's conscience does not condemn him as a finally impenitent sinner. Nevertheless the very sight of Minos, who represents the judgment of the impenitent, warns him that the pilgrimage before him is full of danger.

'O thou that to this dolorous hostelry
Comest,' said Minos to me, when he saw me,
Leaving the practice of so great an office,
'Look how thou enterest, and in whom thou trustest,
Let not the portal's amplitude deceive thee'²

He in whom Dante trusted was Virgil or Reason, the warning therefore seems to mean that in the

¹ *Purg* ix 73 132

² *Inf* v 16-20

contemplation of sin and its penalties, it is possible to trust Reason too much. Familiarity with sin is easy, 'the amplitude of the entrance' is great, but the very contemplation of evil may leave unsuspected stains upon the soul. And, indeed, Dante tells us that he found it so. When he emerged on the shore of Mount Purgatory, Virgil had to wash his tear-stained face with morning dew in order to 'uncover the hue which Hell had covered up' in him.¹ In the meantime, however, the answer which Virgil gives to Minos is that it is not in Reason alone that Dante puts his trust. this pilgrimage is ordained of Heaven, and therefore not undertaken in any pride of his own unaided intellect

CANTO V

'It is so willed there where is power to do
That which is willed, and ask no further question.'²

We turn now to the punishment inflicted on the Sensual, a punishment which, as with all the penalties of the Inferno, is meant by Dante to represent the natural and necessary fruit of the sin, in accordance with the principle, 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that also shall he reap'. The first penalty of a sensual life is darkness.

The Sensual
their Punish-
ment

I came unto a place mute of all light³

Darkness

This, of course, is not peculiar to this Circle; darkness, as the natural symbol of evil, pervades the entire world of the lost. But what Dante wishes to indicate is that sensual sin produces its own special darkness. By concentrating the whole nature on the flesh, and, as he puts it, 'subjecting reason to appe-

¹ *Purg* i 121 129² *Inf* v 23, 24³ *Inf* v 28

CANTO V tite,' reason itself is destroyed, the feelings are hardened, and the very capacity of spiritual vision is lost. Thus with this sin St Paul joins the moral and intellectual blindness of the heathen world of his day: 'being darkened in their understanding, being alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart who being past feeling gave themselves up to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness'¹ Probably Dante had specially before his mind the treatment of the subject by St Thomas Aquinas. Luxury, says Aquinas, by the vehemence of its passions, 'throws the higher powers, the reason and will, into very great disorder'. Hence what he calls 'the daughters of Luxury' are 'blindness of mind, inconsiderateness, headlong haste, inconstancy, self-love, hatred of God, affection for the present world, horror or despair of the world to come'² Probably too it is this 'hatred of God' and 'horror of the world to come,' of which he is thinking when he says of these sinners of the flesh

When they arrive before the precipice,
There are the shrieks, the plants, and the laments,
There they blaspheme the power divine³

'The precipice' seems to mean the edge of the cliff above, from which, when Minos has pronounced judgment, they are hurled to their doom. They hate God, as Aquinas says, and blaspheme Him for 'forbidding the coveted pleasure', and they shrink with horror and despair from a world where such pleasure is now for ever impossible.

¹ *Eph* iv 18, 19

² *Summa*, II-II q 153, a 5

³ *Inf* v 34 36.

For, according to Dante, this is the special torment of this sin, that lust lives on when all hope of its gratification is dead. This eternal restlessness of desire unsatisfied, Dante pictures under the figure of a whirlwind, which bellows like a sea in tempest, and sweeps the souls onward without hope of rest or even of less pain

CANTO V

—
Whirlwind
of Lust.

The infernal hurricane that never rests
Leads the spirits onward in its rapine,
Whirling and smiting, it distresses them ¹

At first glance, indeed, this seems a lighter punishment than is assigned to the same sin in Purgatory. Here it is the wind, there it is fire so intense that, in comparison, molten glass had been a grateful coolness ² Yet if we once realize what this torment of the whirlwind is, we shall not think it small. Even in the present life and world, it not infrequently happens that this sin grows into a wild hurricane of passion, before which reason is swept away like a straw, and the man is driven helplessly on long after the jaded senses have lost the power to enjoy. It may be thought that in another world where the flesh no longer exists, the passions of the flesh must of necessity subside, but Dante's conviction is far otherwise. He thinks rather of the naked human soul, a whirlwind of lusts, bereft for ever of the means of gratifying them. In the *Purgatorio*, for example, he declares that whereas at death the powers of the flesh are 'voiceless all,' the higher faculties are quickened into greater keenness.

'The memory, the intelligence, and the will
In action far more vigorous than before' ³

¹ *Inf* v 31-33

² *Purg* xxviii 49-51

³ *Purg* xxv 79-84

CANTO V We have to think, then, not of a soul freed from its passions through the easy process of escape from the flesh by death, but rather of a soul whose memory, intelligence, and will have been steeped in sensuality, having those faculties quickened into keener activity at the very moment when the flesh, the means of their gratification, is stripped away. Having sown the wind, it reaps the whirlwind. It is, indeed, much the same idea as is set forth in Isaac Taylor's *Physical Theory of Another Life*. There it is argued that the present body acts as a curb on the passions by means of the physical exhaustion which they produce; and that when this 'corporeal limitation' is removed in a future state, the moral faculties, whether good or evil, will attain an intensity and power of which meantime we have no conception.¹

The Two
Bands

As Dante watches these wretched shades, he sees them at first like a great flock of starlings in winter, whirled about in confusion by the wind, 'hither, thither, down, up.' Then, as the wind changes, it sweeps them out into a long line, like cranes 'chanting forth their lays.' As the stream floats past, Virgil points out and names the shades of lovers famous in classic and mediæval story, 'dames of old and cavaliers.' We may perhaps distinguish two groups. In the first are souls whose sensuality had been promiscuous, unbridled, utterly lawless, unredeemed by any touch of nobler feeling, such as Semiramis, and 'Cleopatra the voluptuous.' Semiramis, queen of Assyria, 'made lust legal in her law,' referring to a statement of Orosius that she

¹ *Physical Theory of Another Life*, chap. XIII

legalized the crime of incest. It is probably for this that she heads the long procession. It is not so easy to understand why Dido is named between Semiramis and Cleopatra

CANTO V
Dido.

'The next is she who killed herself for love,
And broke faith with the ashes of Sichæus,'¹

her dead husband. As a suicide, we might expect to find her in the weird Wood of Circle VII. It has been suggested that the reason why she is not there is that to heathen minds suicide was not sinful, provided it was committed for some worthy cause. Passing from this, however, it seems certain that although Dante names Dido between Semiramis and Cleopatra, he has no intention of setting her on the same low level of guilt. They were women of unbridled licentiousness, whereas Dido's sin was a single guilty passion. That this distinction is meant to be drawn by Dante is evident from the fact that he is careful to tell us that Paolo and Francesca 'issued from the band where Dido is'; and obviously a single passion which unites two lovers in both time and eternity, however guilty it may be, is not to be put upon the level of a base and indiscriminate profligacy. There are, then, two bands representing two widely different degrees of guilt at the head of the one is Semiramis, of the other Dido. Before passing from the subject, one is tempted to wonder why Dido is here, while Æneas reposes with the blameless souls of heroes on 'the green enamel' of the meadow in the Circle above. In the *De Monarchia*,² indeed, Dante expressly recognizes Dido as

¹ *Inf* v 61, 62

² *De Mon* ii 3 Comp *Æn* iv 171-172

CANTO V *Æneas's* second wife, declaring that he was 'ennobled' by his three marriages, of which this second one related him to Africa, as the other two to Asia and Europe. If she was his wife, it is difficult to see why she is in this Circle at all, and more difficult to understand why a marriage which 'ennobled' *Æneas* should brand her with shame. The silent indignation and hatred with which, according to Virgil, she meets *Æneas* in Hades, certainly seems nearer to his deserts.¹

Among the souls that 'loved not wisely but too well,' Virgil points out Helen and Achilles, Paris and Tristan, with more than a thousand other shades 'whom Love had parted from our life.' To some of these—perhaps because their love had a touch of nobleness in it—there seem to come lulls in the storm, brief moments of respite from the agony of vain desire. The interest of many generations of readers has centred itself on two of these souls who have the comfort, bitter-sweet, of not being separated even in Hell. These are Paolo Malatesta and Francesca da Rimini, perhaps next to Dante and Beatrice the most familiar names in the whole poem.² It has been often pointed out that Francesca has the mournful distinction of being the only Christian woman in the *Inferno*. Indeed, in comparison with men, there are few women in it at all. It would almost seem as if Dante believed that goodness came more naturally and easily to women, or it may be due to that reverence for Womanhood which we see in his worship of Mary, Beatrice, and Lucia.³

Paolo and
Francesca da
Rimini.

¹ *Æn* vi 450-476

² *Inf* v 73-142

³ This is the more remarkable as it is against the mediæval feelings

Dante's attention is drawn to these two souls, CANTO V
because they go together,

And seem upon the wind to be so light

This need not be taken, as is sometimes done, as symbolic of lightmindedness, it is rather that their being together makes it easier for them to float on that wind of passion,—it seems almost their native element. Hence the comparison to doves which follows. When Dante, moved by the intensity of his pity, calls them, they float towards him softly like doves 'to the sweet nest' there was to him something soft, gentle, dove-like in the love which had brought them to 'the woful pass' As we saw, they come 'from the band where Dido is,' the nobler souls that have been mastered by a single guilty passion, and in the momentary lull of the tempest, we hear 'a small flute-voice of infinite wail,' the voice of Francesca telling her sad story while her companion ceases not to weep. What exactly that story was, it is not easy now to discover through the successive veils of romance which have been thrown over it. The tale as thus popularly embellished is to this effect. Francesca's marriage was a political one. Her father, Guido Vecchio da Polenta, lord of Ravenna, in order to heal a feud between himself and the house of the Malatesta of Rimini, betrothed

about women, if painting and sculpture are any guide. 'Characteristically enough, the procession waiting for judgment in Christian delineations of the scene consists almost entirely of women. The notion that woman is, in an emphatic and peculiar sense, the ally and satellite of Satan originated in the legend of the fall of man, and was strengthened by the institution of sacerdotal celibacy' (Evans's *Animal Symbolism in Ecclesiastical Architecture*, 331-333)

CANTO V his beautiful daughter to Gianciotto, the second son of that family. Now this Gianciotto being deformed, as his name implies—'Cripple John'—it was thought advisable to send to the betrothal his handsome brother Paolo as his proxy. Naturally enough, the young girl fell in love with him, thinking he was the husband chosen for her, and from this first deception of which she was the victim sprang the whole tragedy which followed. Some years after the husband surprised and slew them with his own hand. According to some forms of the story, Paolo would have escaped through a trap-door, had not his shirt of mail caught upon a nail, whereupon Francesca seeing his danger threw herself between the brothers and received the stroke meant for her lover. It is said that they were buried together just as they were, and that, three centuries later, on their tomb being opened, the silken garments in which they had been slain were found quite fresh.

It is an ungrateful task to discredit a romance which would set the conduct of these lovers in a comparatively favourable light, yet plain dates and facts leave us no alternative. The marriage took place about the year 1275, when Dante was a boy of ten. Paolo was already a married man. The tragedy occurred about ten years after, probably in 1285, and at the time Francesca had a daughter of nine, and Paolo, who had been married for sixteen years, was the father of two sons. Under such circumstances, their sin was not one of romantic and inexperienced youth, as it is popularly supposed to have been. Yet one difficulty remains. If these are the plain and

somewhat commonplace facts, how comes it that Dante sets the story in a light so strangely pathetic and beautiful that we almost forget the sin in pity for the lovers' doom? It certainly cannot have been because he did not know the facts. The closing years of his life were spent under the protection of Francesca's nephew, Guido Novello, lord of Ravenna; and there he must have heard all that could be told of the tragedy. Probably gratitude to his friend and host prompted him to throw round his kinswoman as favourable a light as possible. Nevertheless this would not account for everything. There is in Dante's whole treatment of the story a peculiar something which proves to my mind that, from all he knew, he did not regard it as the low and vulgar intrigue which such sins commonly are. There was in it, in spite of its guilt, some nobler quality of love, which he strives to bring out. Take, for example, the words concerning Love, which he puts into Francesca's lips:

'Love, that on gentle heart doth swiftly seize,
Seized this man for the person beautiful
Which was ta'en from me, and still the mode offends me,
Love, which to no loved one pardons loving,
Seized me with pleasure of this man so strongly,
That, as thou seest, it doth not yet desert me
Love has conducted us unto one death,
Caina waiteth him who quenched our life!'¹

When Dante hears these words which declare that love in their case was no momentary fever of the senses, but an eternal bond of soul with soul, he bows

¹ *Inf* v 100-107 Mark the repetition of the word *Love*

CANTO V his head so long that Virgil has to ask what he is thinking of. His answer is

‘ Ah me!

How many sweet thoughts, how much desire,
Conducted these unto the woful pass!’¹

It was no low passion to begin with, no evil was thought at first. Slowly, unconsciously, Love led them to death by gentle gradations of sweet thoughts and fond desires. In those fair dreaming days when Love was still pure and innocent, they had no suspicion, no sudden prophetic hint and flash, that sweet thought and fond desire would at last grow into this infernal hurricane of passion. Dante wonders what it was that brought to an end the long sweet conflict and uncertainty of their ‘dubious desires’, and Francesca, weeping bitterly at the memory of the happy day, tells him it was the reading together of the mediæval Romance of Lancelot and Guinevere

‘ One day we reading were for our delight
Of Lancelot, how love did him enthrall
Alone we were and without all suspicion
Full many a time our eyes together drew
That reading, and changed the colour of our faces,
But one point only was it that o’ercame us
Whenas we read of the much-longed-for smile
Being by such a noble lover kissed,
This one, who ne’er from me shall be divided,
Kissed me upon the mouth all trembling
Galeotto was the book, and he who wrote it,
That day no farther did we read therein’²

**Condemnation
of Mediæval
Romances**

The reference to Galeotto is Dante’s judgment on the mediæval Romances of love. Galeotto is sometimes confounded with Galahad, but Mr. Paget

¹ *Inf* v 112-114

² *Inf* v 127-138

Toynbee has proved conclusively that the reference is to Gallehault in the Old French Romance of *Lancelot du Lac*¹. He was the knight who acted as intermediary between Lancelot and Guinevere, and urged the Queen to give the kiss which was the beginning of their guilt. Similarly the Romance itself had been *their* Gallehault—the pander that led them to the fatal sin. As already said, it is Dante's judgment concerning the evil influence of the Romances of love so popular in his day, and his warning to the writers of them: their guilt is greater and will set them in a much lower Circle.

Although one would gladly escape from the subject, it may be well to glance briefly at Dante's treatment of the kindred sins throughout the *Commedia*, in order to have the whole range of his teaching before our minds. In Circle VII, for example, we shall find those whose sensuality is unnatural, the sensuality of Sodom, and in the Circle beneath that again, panders and seducers, betrayers of women.² They are thrust down to these lower depths because Dante recognizes about this sin, as he does about all the sins of Incontinence, that there is a form of it which is by comparison natural, and, if one may say so, honest, frank, and open, whereas there are other forms which involve the violation of Nature, and the basest betrayal of trust and love. Whenever these elements of vileness enter into this sin, they rightly sink the soul to a far deeper perdition.

Passing to the *Purgatorio*, we find the souls of penitent Sensualists on the last Terrace of the

¹ *Dante Studies and Researches*, 1-37

² *Inf.* xvi, xviii

CANTO V — Mount, burning away their evil passions and habits by the fiery pain of parting with them¹ Obviously Dante's meaning is that Sensuality is the last evil of which human nature is purged, and that even then the soul is saved only 'so as by fire,'—so tenacious is its grasp, and so burning is the pain of giving it up. Probably the reason is the same as that which makes it the least heinous sin in Hell, namely, that it has a natural basis in the flesh For that reason it is the least guilty, for that reason it is also the most deeply rooted, the last of which the soul gets free Nay further, Dante declares that there is a very real sense in which the soul never gets free from it The third Heaven of Paradise is Venus, the symbol of the abode of Lovers It lies, like the Moon and Mercury, within the shadow of the earth² The meaning is that the shadow of this sin of earth, although forgiven and purged away, yet lies like a darkness upon the joy of Heaven itself What he wishes to tell us is that no man can give to sinful love a heart that was meant for the love of God, without permanently lessening the power of his soul to know the Divine light and rejoice in it, the sinful love lies like the shadow of earth upon his soul for ever

So stern is Dante's judgment of this sin; and it is this very sternness which gives intensity to his pity for the victims of it, at least in its more open and natural form He sets it here in the highest Circle in which any sin is punished When he hears Francesca's story he weeps for pity, and at the close of it

¹ *Purg* xxv, xxvi

² *Par* ix 118

swoons and falls, 'even as a dead body falls.' He recognizes the faithfulness of these lovers to each other even in their guilty passion, and rewards it by leaving them the sad comfort of floating light upon the wind together. Indeed, so strong is his sympathy with this sin throughout the poem, that we wonder what the reason is. In the passage before us, for instance, we cannot but mark how much severer is the punishment which he measures out to the injured husband. Francesca foretells his doom

'Caina waiteth him who quenched our life'

Now, Caina is that part of the lowest Circle in which traitors to their kin are frozen in a lake of ice. It receives its name from Cain, the first fratricide, and perhaps this is why Giancesotto is consigned to it. But was he a traitor to his wife and brother? Were not *they* rather traitors to him? Probably the reason why Dante condemns him to the Circle of Traitors is that he knew of some element of treachery in his conduct towards them, although it is unknown to us. But passing this by, why does he set a sin like Treachery at the very bottom of Hell, and Sensuality at the top? As already said, the reason seems to be that the latter is mere lack of control of a natural appetite, whereas the former is a base and under-hand violation of the bonds of Nature's own creating. If this is somewhat of a reversal of popular and ecclesiastical conceptions of morality, it is at least more in harmony with the warning to the priests and elders of Israel 'Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you'

CHAPTER VI

CIRCLE III —THE GLUTTONOUS

CANTO VI WHEN Dante awoke from the swoon into which his
Guardian— pity for Francesca threw him, he found himself
Cerberus in the Circle of the Gluttons, surrounded by 'new
Symbol of torments and new tormented' As in his crossing of
Gluttony Acheron, he tells us nothing of the mode by which
he reached this Circle Its Guardian is Cerberus, an
obvious symbol of the sin of Gluttony—a dog with the
three throats of heathen mythology, to indicate his
insatiable appetite His red eyes denote drunken-
ness, his large belly his capacity of gorging himself,
his beard foul with grease, the want of physical
self-respect which is characteristic of this sin. Virgil
calls him contemptuously 'the great worm,' to indi-
cate the low grovelling nature of a sin which feeds
on earth; for when he opens his great mouths to
attack the pilgrims, Virgil quiets him by flinging
handfuls of earth into his 'rapacious gullets.' This
is obviously imitated from the *Æneid*, but there it
is a sop of honey and grain that the Sibyl flings
to make him sleep. Here he is not so dainty, a
few handfuls of the foul and sodden earth suffice.
Like a watch-dog, he barks over the prostrate souls,
and the teeth and claws with which he 'rends and

flays and quarters' them are symbolic of their own CANTO VI
vile appetite, which devours them through eternity. —

Moreover, this devouring appetite lives on under Punishment of Gluttony
circumstances which greatly aggravate its torment.

Dante seems to have had before his mind the terrible contrast drawn by Christ between the rich man, clothed in purple and fine linen and faring sumptuously every day, and the same man stripped of everything, and glad to beg a drop of water from The Rain. the beggar who once lay at his gate. There is here the same utter reversal of the self-indulgent comfort and luxury which formed the happiness of these gluttons on earth. Then they sat in their warm and comfortable banqueting-rooms, now they are utterly homeless, without a roof to shelter them from the storm. Under a murky sky they lie wallowing in the mud like pigs, beaten by hail, rain, and snow, which never cease, and glad if they can shelter one side by turning on the other. The perfumes and appetizing odours of their feasts are gone, and the foul earth on which they lie sends forth a noisome smell, symbolic of the foulness of their life. The deafening barking of Cerberus has taken the place of the song and music of old days, instead of the pleasant talk and the 'flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar,' they now howl like dogs. It is possible, of course, to draw out the contrasts into too great detail, but they certainly seem too numerous to be accidental.

Further, Gluttony, like all sins of the flesh, dulls The blinding mire and darkens the mind, hence Dante speaks of these souls as 'the blind'—indeed, it is difficult to see how

CANTO VI they could be anything else, since they lie with their faces sunken in the mud. Doubtless he is thinking of one of the 'daughters of Gluttony' of which St. Thomas Aquinas speaks, 'dulness of mind for intellectual things.' 'The edge of reason,' says Aquinas, 'is dulled by immoderation in meat and drink, and in this respect *dulness of perception in intellectual things is put down as a daughter of Gluttony*; as, on the contrary, abstinence helps to the gathering of wisdom, according to the text "I thought in my heart to withdraw my flesh from wine, that I might turn my mind to wisdom" "¹ But, indeed, it needs no Aquinas to tell us this—most people know by experience that a heavy dinner clouds the mental faculties with drowsiness, and after a life-time of this over-indulgence the mind, in Spenser's words, is drowned in meat and drink. To Dante, however, probably the worst punishment of all, or at least the most disgusting, was the foulness of the sin, symbolized in the foulness of its punishment, and the way in which it brutalizes men. Cerberus, as we saw, is a dog—a 'great worm'—with all the disgusting marks of brutish excess upon him. The souls wallow in the mud like pigs and bark like dogs. The earth is foul with stench. The only shade singled out for special mention is one whose gluttonous habits gained him in Florence the nickname of Ciaccio, 'the Hog,' and whose foul intemperance had so disfigured his features, that Dante fails to

Foulness of
Gluttony

¹ *Summa*, ii ii q. cxlviii a. 6. The quotation is from the Vulgate of *Eccles* ii 3, in the English version the meaning is very different. 'I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom.'

recognize him when he lifts his mud-stained face from the ground. No wonder he says of this punishment, CANTO VI
—

‘If some are greater, none is so displeasing’¹

For, in truth, there is something peculiarly disgusting in gluttony, something ruinous to a man's physical self-respect, no matter how the epicure may hide it from himself for a time by the fair appointments of the table

Nevertheless, foul and degrading as this sin is, Ciaccio—
‘the Hog’ Dante proceeds to indicate that there are many others more heinous morally and spiritually, and this he does by means of a conversation with the Ciaccio just referred to. The passage is interesting because this is the first Florentine Dante meets in the other world, and the encounter gives rise to the first of the denunciations of Florence with which the poem abounds. First Denun-
ciation of
Florence. This Ciaccio is said to have been an inveterate frequenter of the tables of the rich, whether invited or not. It is uncertain whether Ciaccio was his own proper name or a nickname given him for his gluttonous habits. Dante would have cared little which—name or nickname, the ‘Hog’ was entirely appropriate. At first, he cannot recognize the bloated face, all stained with mud, although Ciaccio tells him he was his contemporary

‘Thou wast made before I was unmade’²

On learning who he is, the poet is anxious to hear news of his native city, from which his banishment shut him out. According to a law of Hell which it is

¹ *Inf* vi 48

² *Inf* vi 42

CANTO VI — difficult to account for, the shades know the future course of earthly events Dante therefore asks Ciacco three questions about Florence · first, what would be the issue of its faction-feuds between Blacks and Whites, second, whether there were any just men left in it, and lastly, what was the cause of its being plunged into such discord. Surprise has been expressed that he should ask such questions of such a man, yet the reason is simple enough Nothing could better express the poet's despairing judgment on the moral condition of his native city even Ciacco the blind, gluttonous hog, wallowing in mud, was prophet enough to foretell its inevitable fate In reply to his first question, he informs Dante that after much strife and bloodshed, the Whites, whom he calls 'the party of the woods,' will expel the Blacks, that 'within three suns' they, in their turn, will be driven out and kept in exile for many years, in spite of their prayers and indignation. And this reverse, he says, will happen

'By force of him who now keeps tacking'¹

The reference is almost certainly to the treacherous conduct of Pope Boniface VIII in the matter of Charles of Valois, through which the party of the Blacks were admitted to the city in order to expel the Whites In short, it is a brief statement of the history of the two or three fatal years in which Dante himself had played no small part, and which ended in his exile and the ruin of his earthly fortunes. In answer to his second question, Ciacco tells him

¹ *Inf* vi 69

there are only two just men left in the city, and they are not listened to. No hint of their identity is given, but it is conjectured that they are Dante himself and his friend Guido Cavalcanti. It matters less to know who they were, than to mark the low ebb to which, in Dante's opinion, common honesty had sunk in Florence in 1300, the year of his priorate. The answer to his third question is that the cause of all the dissensions is the threefold sin of envy, pride, and avarice. It may be said—it has often been said—that all this is only Dante's own angry and bitter way of giving back blow for blow to the city that had banished him. His statements, however, are entirely vindicated by those of his contemporary, Giovanni Villani, who was inside the city and did not belong to the party exiled. He narrates in his *Chronicle* the events of 1303, the last of the three years referred to in this passage. The various parties inside the city came to blows and shed much blood over the question whether the public accounts of those in office and who administered the monies of the commonwealth should be examined. To such a pass did this civil war come, that Lucca had to interfere to prevent the city from totally destroying itself. Villani closes his account by attributing the danger and suffering through which the city had just passed to precisely the same three sins here named by Dante. 'And this adversity and peril of our city was not without the judgment of God, by reason of many sins committed through the pride and envy and avarice of our then living citizens, which were then ruling the city, and alike of the

CANTO VI rebels therein, as of those which were governing, for they were great sinners, nor was this the end thereof, as hereafter in due time may be seen.¹

Five Noble
Florentines

Dante proceeds to make some further inquiries which it is very difficult to account for. He asks Ciaccio concerning the eternal fate of certain dead Florentines, five in number — 'whether Heaven soothes or Hell empsons them' They were men in whom good and evil were so strangely mingled that he wonders which won their souls in the end of the day. He had a great admiration for them because 'on good deeds they set their thoughts' Yet Ciaccio, who seems to know Hell as well as if it were Florence, destroys any lingering hope he may have had of their salvation

'They are among the blackest souls,

A different crime downweighs them to the bottom,

If thou so far descendest, thou canst see them'²

Dante does descend so far, and meets them all except a certain Arrigo, of whom no further mention is made. Farinata degli Uberti, the great Ghibelline leader who saved Florence after the battle of Montaperti in 1260, lies in a burning tomb in the City of Dis, the Circle of Heretics.³ Tegghiaio Aldobrandi, of the great Guelph family of the Adimari, also fought at Montaperti, but on the other side, after using his utmost influence to dissuade his party from a conflict which almost destroyed it, Dante sees him and Jacopo Rusticucci whirled incessantly like a wheel in the Circle of the Violent against Nature.⁴ The

¹ *Villani*, bk viii 68

² *Inf* x 22-121

³ *Inf* vi 85-87

⁴ *Inf* xvi 1-89

last is Mosca de' Lamberti, who in 1215 gave the fatal advice which led to the murder of Buondelmonte, and divided the city into Guelphs and Ghibellines. In the Moat of the Schismatics, Dante sees him holding up the two bleeding stumps of his arms.¹ Now, it is difficult to believe that Dante's inquiry about these souls was prompted by mere curiosity concerning their fate. It is rather to emphasize the pessimistic and despairing view which he took of the moral state of his native city. Two just men it contained and only two ten would have saved Sodom. And then his mind seems to have glanced off to the best men of an earlier generation—men who 'set their thoughts on doing good,' and left behind them noble names. Alas, at the heart of the goodness of every one of them some deadly sin was eating like a canker—Heresy, Unnatural Vice, Civil Faction, and if such things were true of the noblest and best men of Florence, what of the rest? The city was another Sodom, ready for the penal flame. Some such association of ideas we may imagine led to Dante's curiosity concerning the doom of these five noble Florentines, it reveals the sad despairing view which he took of the morals of his native city.

The last words of Ciaccio are a request that when Dante returns to 'the sweet world' he would recall him to the minds of men. All down the Inferno, with the exception of a few who have the grace to wish to be forgotten, the souls of the lost feel that it is better to be remembered for their

¹ *Inf* xxviii 103-111

CANTO VI wickedness than not remembered at all. This longing for fame, even though it be ill-fame, seems to be regarded as a weakness peculiar to the lost. The souls on Mount Purgatory do, indeed, wish to be remembered by their friends on earth, but it is in order to receive the benefit of their prayers, while the redeemed in Paradise have no desire for any remembrance in this lower world, so completely are they satisfied with the vision of God. As Ciaccio after this request falls back into the blinding mud, Virgil informs Dante that he will wake no more till 'the angelic trumpet' sounds. Then each soul must 'revisit his sad tomb,' re-assume his flesh and form, and hear his sentence which shall 'resound through eternity'. As they pass on, wading slowly through 'the filthy mixture of the shadows and the rain,' Dante inquires what the result will be of this re-assumption of the flesh at the last day: will it increase the torment, or lessen it, or leave it as it is? Virgil's answer is

**Resurrection
of the Body**

'Return unto thy science,
Which wills, that as the thing more perfect is,
The more it feels of pleasure and of pain.'¹

It is disputed whether 'thy science' means the philosophy of Aristotle or the doctrines of Christian Theology. As a matter of fact, it means both. Dante is simply following the teaching of Aquinas as based on Aristotle. 'The soul without the body,' says St Thomas, 'has not the perfection of its nature', and

¹ *Inf.* vi 106-108. For the body, or rather shade, of the Intermediate State, see *Purg.* xxv 79-108, for Resurrection body of the redeemed, *Par.* xiv 13-66.

he teaches that the re-assuming of the body in the resurrection will increase the joy of the redeemed and the agony of the lost. It is somewhat strange to find that Virgil has knowledge of the Christian doctrine of the resurrection, especially as Aquinas holds that the power of the resurrection is miraculous, not natural. It almost seems as if Dante regarded the knowledge as lying within the circle of the natural mind and reason of man, without the aid of revelation. It is possible, however, as Plumptre suggests, that 'Virgil's knowledge has been enlarged behind the veil'

CANTO VI

CHAPTER VII

CIRCLE IV — MISERS AND PRODIGALS

CANTO VII SENSUALITY and Gluttony are Incontinence of the body; we now come to Incontinence of goods. Following Aristotle, Dante regards this sin as consisting of two extremes — money may be abused by holding it too greedily, or by squandering it too lavishly. Hence the Fourth Circle, into which the pilgrims now descend, contains both Misers and Prodigals, sinners of the close fist and of the open hand. They are left and right of the self-same sin, Avarice.

Guardian —
Plutus
Symbol of
Riches

The Jailor of the Circle is Plutus, the Greek god of wealth, from which we have our familiar word plutocrat.¹ As in the case of Minos, Dante degrades him into a demonic and brutal form. In mythology he is represented variously,—sometimes as a boy with a cornucopia, sometimes as a child carried in the arms of Fortune or of Peace. Dante, however, will have nothing to do with this conception of the god of riches as a thing of childlike innocence, the companion of peace and plenty, but sinks him into

¹ It is uncertain whether Dante intended *Pluto* to represent Pluto, otherwise called Hades, the god of the nether world, or Plutus, the god of wealth. It is probable that he did not very clearly distinguish between the two, since even in classical times they were sometimes identified (Toynbee, *Dante Dictionary*).

an 'accursed wolf' with 'bloated lip' We saw that CANTO VII
 the fiercest of the three beasts which obstructed his
 ascent of the mountain was an old She-wolf, and on
 the Fifth Cornice of Purgatory the name is expressly
 applied to Avarice¹ This brutifying and demonizing
 of Plutus is the poet's way of stripping off the dis-
 guise of innocence and peace which wealth often
 wears, and revealing the wolf underneath The love
 of money is no harmless boy pouring out a horn of
 plenty, no sweet and innocent child borne in the
 arms of Peace: it is a beast of prey living upon
 others, 'a root of all kinds of evil'

When Plutus saw the travellers approaching, he
 cried out in his 'clucking voice'

'Pape Sultan, pape Satan, aleppe !'—²

'Pape Satan !'

words which Virgil, 'who knew all,' may have
 understood, but which have never been satisfac-
 torily explained Different commentators have
 regarded them as Hebrew, French, Greek, or Greek
 and Latin mixed. We need not waste time over
 what appears to be an insoluble problem They
 seem to be meant as an intimidation to the pilgrims,
 or as a shout of warning to Satan, 'the Emperor of
 the kingdom dolorous,' that his realm is being in-
 vaded by 'a living soul' It has been suggested that
 the cry is an intentionally obscure way of saying
 that the Pope was Satan, and, while there is no need
 to bind ourselves to this view, it is yet worth noting
 that the Church contributes to this Circle many
 shaven heads—Popes and Cardinals being expressly

¹ *Purg* xx 10

² *Inf* vii 1

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CANTO VII named as those 'in whom Avarice doth practise its excess'¹

For all his outcry, a few words from Virgil quickly dispose of Plutus. Commanding the 'accursed wolf' to be silent, he says

'Not causeless is our journey to the abyss,
Thus it is willed on high, there where Michael wrought
Vengeance upon the proud adultery'²

The reference is, of course, to the defeat of the rebel angels, but it is not easy to see why it is brought in here, or why their revolt is called 'the proud adultery'. In Scripture any unfaithfulness to God is regarded as spiritual adultery. Virgil's meaning seems to be that covetousness is also spiritual unfaithfulness, the giving to material things the devotion which is due to God alone, and that He who avenged Himself on the one form of infidelity was able to avenge Himself on the other. At the word, Plutus falls to the ground,

Even as the sails inflated by the wind
Together full involved when snaps the mast,³

perhaps to indicate the ease with which Reason disposes of wealth with its swelling pretensions and threats, or the terror with which the thought of God's judgment inspires men whose god is this world.

Miserliness
and Prodigality—two
sides of the
same coin

Let us now examine somewhat more carefully the sin of this Circle. As we saw, it is abuse of one's goods, and this abuse takes two opposite forms—Miserliness and Prodigality, greed in hoarding and

¹ *Inf.* vii 46-48

² *Inf.* vii 10-12

³ *Inf.* vii 13-15

recklessness in spending. These are placed in the same Circle because they are at root the same greed of gold: for greed is greed whether its ultimate object be to hoard or to squander. The idea is taken from Aristotle's *Ethics*. The liberal man is one who stands free of the evils of both extremes, giving the right amount, at the right time, to the right persons, and in the right spirit. The illiberal or miserly man is he who breaks these conditions of right giving by deficiency, as the prodigal breaks them by excess. Dante, it is to be noticed, indicates that Miserliness is the worse by setting it on the left hand; and in this estimate he follows both Aristotle and Aquinas. The latter gives three reasons why Prodigality is the lesser sin. In the first place, it is more akin to liberality, being an excess of giving. 'Secondly, because the prodigal is useful to many, to whom he gives, but the miser to none, not even to himself. Thirdly, because the prodigal is easy to cure, as well by the approach of old age, which is contrary to prodigality, as by his easily sinking into poverty through his many useless expenses, and thus impoverished, he cannot run to excess in giving, and also because he is easily brought to virtue by the likeness that he bears to it. But the miser's is no easy cure.' Indeed, Aristotle declares that illiberality is incurable because it runs in human nature, and because old age and impotence of any kind only increase it.¹

On the other hand, Dante knew well that there is a danger of exalting Prodigality into a virtue

Miserliness
the worse

Yet Prodi-
gality no
Virtue

¹ *Ethics*, iv 1, 2, 3, *Summa*, ii ii q cxix a 3

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CANTO VII There is frequently about a spendthrift a certain open-handed 'generosity,' which hides the evil of his life; and of this an instance is given in the *Purgatorio*. On the corresponding Terrace there he meets the poet Statius, whose besetting sin had been Prodigality. But the time was when he had not recognized it as a sin, what opened his eyes, he tells Virgil, was a passage from his writings.

'When I the passage heard where thou exclaimest
As if indignant against human nature,
"Through what dost thou not drive, O cursed hunger
Of gold, the appetite of mortal men?"
Then I perceived the hands could spread too wide
Their wings in spending' ¹

In other words, Statius learned that the spendthrift is cursed with the 'hunger of gold' as surely as the miser, and that it often drives him into the same unscrupulous ways of satisfying it. Probably Dante had in mind the following passage from Aristotle's *Ethics*. 'Most prodigals not only give to the wrong people, but take from the wrong sources, and are so far illiberal. They become grasping because they are eager to spend, and are not able to do so easily, as their means soon run short, they are therefore obliged to get the means from other sources. At the same time, as nobleness is a matter of indifference to them, they are reckless and indiscriminate in their taking, for they are eager to give but do not care at all how they give, or how they get the means

¹ *Purg.* xxii 38-44. The reference is to Virgil's 'Quid non mortalia pectora cogis, Auri sacra fames!' (*Æn.* iii 56, 57). *Sacra* is sometimes taken in a good sense, 'O hallowed hunger of gold.'

of giving.¹ In the *Convito* there is a passage in CANTO VII which Dante indignantly denounces this 'generosity' with ill-got gains: 'Is this any other,' he asks sarcastically, 'than to steal the cloth from the altar, to cover with it both the thief and his table?'²

Before passing on, let us note that another and darker form of this sin of Prodigality is punished in a lower Circle, that of the Violent against Themselves. There Dante sees spendthrifts who virtually committed suicide by a wild and reckless squandering of the very means of life, hunted and torn throughout eternity by the hounds of their own insane prodigality.³

In similar fashion, he distinguishes various forms and degrees of the sister-sin of Avarice. In the three lowest Circles we shall find Usurers, Simoniacs, Barrators, and Judas who sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver. Plainly all are avaricious, and in not setting them in this upper Circle Dante is once more following Aristotle, who distinguishes various kinds and qualities of Covetousness. There are men who are mere skinflints, not coveting the property of others, but simply determined not to part with their own. Others do indeed covet what belongs to their fellows, but are restrained from taking it by fear. Still others so far break through such restraints that they engage in dishonourable and evil callings for love of wealth, such as 'usurers who lend small sums of money at extortionate rates of interest'. In short, Dante recognizes two distinct qualities of Covetousness which differ widely in

¹ *Ethics*, iv 3

² *Conv* iv 27

³ *Inf* xiii 109 129

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CANTO VII — their degrees of guilt. One is simple inability so to control our possessions that we neither grasp them too firmly nor throw them away with too free a hand. The other allies itself with Violence, Fraud, and Treachery, becomes therefore a sin against Society, and for this reason is plunged into deeper abysses of perdition.

Prevalence of the Sin. Dante tells us that this Circle is the most densely populated in Hell

Here saw I people many more than elsewhere ¹

Again and again he refers to the prevalence of this sin the ability to spend money wisely, neither hoarding nor squandering, is far from common. But what evidently surprises him most is the prevalence of this abuse of money among the clergy. On the left hand, and therefore among the Misers, he sees many tonsured heads, and is informed by Virgil that they belong to clerks, Popes, and Cardinals, 'in whom Avarice practises its excess.' St. Thomas Aquinas, discussing Prodigality, says it is a sin against a man's self, and also against his neighbour, since it squanders the goods out of which he ought to provide for others 'And this appears most of all in clerics, who are dispensers of the goods of the Church, which belong to the poor, and the poor they defraud by their prodigal expenditure' ² It seems to have been Dante's belief that Miserliness was a greater temptation to churchmen than the more generous sin of spending too freely. It is a curious question why the very men who by

¹ *Inf* vii 25.

² *Summa*, ii ii q cxix a 3

their calling profess to have forsaken the world, are CANTO VII
 notoriously in bondage to it. Perhaps the conjecture of an old commentator is not far from the truth 'I own I cannot find a cause for avarice in prelates, unless it be that perchance prohibition engenders concupiscence'¹

We come now to the punishment of this sin. It Punishment
the Rolling
of Weights
 consists in the perpetual rolling of great weights round the Circle. The Misers roll to the left, the Prodigals to the right, until they meet and clash together like billows on Charybdis² When this encounter takes place, the two companies revile each other the Prodigals crying, 'Why hoardest thou?'—the Misers retorting, 'Why squanderest thou?' Then the rival bands turn and roll their weights in the opposite directions, until the waves clash again, and thus through eternity they 'dance their roundelay' The meaning is obvious It is the unrest which covetousness produces here, prolonged into another world Aquinas says that one of 'the daughters of Avarice' is restlessness, and we know it without his testimony The incessant toils which men undergo for money, the laborious days and sleepless nights, the dangers and privations they face how truly they are symbolized in this perpetual rolling of heavy weights 'by main-force of

¹ Benvenuto da Imola, quoted by Vernon (*Readings on Inferno*, 1 217)

² The comparison to Charybdis is symbolic In the myth Charybdis was a voracious woman, who stole oxen from Hercules, and was hurled by the thunderbolt of Zeus into the sea The name was given to a rock between Italy and Sicily There thrice a day she drank in the sea-waves, and thrice poured them out again Her greed in stealing the oxen and the fluctuations of the waves made her, in Dante's mind, symbolic of Avarice and its stormy tides.

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CANTO VII chest.' In the *Convito* Dante dwells upon the burden of anxiety the mere possession of riches lays upon men, not to speak of the previous labour of acquisition: 'It is the cause of evil, because it makes the possessor wakeful, timid and hateful. How great fear is that of a man who knows he carries riches about him, in journeying, in resting, not only when awake but when sleeping, not only that he will lose his property, but his very life for the sake of his property. Well do the miserable merchants know, who go about the world, that the leaves which the wind stirs make them tremble when they are carrying their riches with them, and when they are without it, full of confidence, singing and talking they make their journey shorter'¹ The clashing of the weights half round the Circle, and the taunts the two bands fling at each other, represent the constant ebb and flow of money between misers and prodigals, the way in which they act as a check on each other, and their mutual hatred and misunderstanding, each class thinking the other fools. What Dante sees is that this toil and unrest do not cease with this present world. If for a lifetime a man allows this restless passion to gain possession of his soul, the mere physical change of death will not cast it out, it is even possible it may increase its power. The man has entered a world in which no gold exists, while the thirst for it burns on, the restless, resistless habit of a lifetime. For that toil and buffeting, therefore, which Dante puts in this symbolic form, no Hell beyond the man himself is

¹ *Conv* iv 13

necessary. he has that within his own soul which CANTO VII
will not let him rest. Truly does Virgil say : —

‘ All the gold that is beneath the moon,
Or ever has been, of these weary souls
Could never make a single one repose.’¹

And the reason is the simple one that these souls have given to gold the passion and devotion meant for God Himself, as Dante tells us in a fine passage in the *Convito* ‘ And since God is the beginning of our souls and the maker of them like unto Himself, as it is written, “ Let us make man in our image and likeness,” this soul desires above all things to return to Him. And even as a pilgrim who goes by a way he has never travelled, who believes every house he sees from afar to be his inn, and not finding it to be so directs his faith to the next, and so from house to house till he comes to the inn, so our soul the moment that it enters on the new and never-travelled path of this life, directs its eyes to the goal of its Highest Good, and therefore whatever thing it sees which appears to have in itself any good, believes that it is it. And because its first knowledge is imperfect through want of experience and teaching, small goods appear to it great, and therefore it begins first to desire those. Whence we see little children desire above all things an apple, and then, proceeding further on, desire a little bird, and then, further on, desire a beautiful garment, and then a horse, and then a wife, and then riches, not great, then great, and then very great. And this happens

¹ *Inf* vii 84-86

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CANTO VII because in none of these things does it find that which it goes in search of, and it thinks to find it further on.¹ Now, in this search the covetous soul has stopped short at riches as its Highest Good; but being created to find its Highest Good in God alone, is tormented by an eternal restlessness.

Loss of
Individuality

There is in the punishment of the Covetous a second element which is very curious and interesting they have grown unrecognizable As he views the vast crowd, Dante thinks that here, as elsewhere in the Inferno, he ought to know some of them, but Virgil says

‘ Vain thoughts thou gatherest
The undiscerning life, which made them sordid,
Now makes them unto all discernment dark ’²

The meaning may be that the pursuit of money leaves a man without name or fame on earth it is a mean and sordid life which has no claim upon men's memories But I incline to think that Dante's thought goes deeper, and refers to the effect of the love of money on the man himself Is not the idea this, that the exclusive pursuit of money has some peculiar power of blotting out a man's individuality, and making him one of a vast indistinguishable crowd, all stamped with the same base image and superscription? And probably Dante is right. To change the figure slightly, as coins by constant circulation lose the sharp image and superscription with which they left the mint, so this sin, through long years of commerce with the world, wears away the individual stamp of the soul Dante seems to

¹ *Conv* iv 12 *Comp* iii 15

² *Inf* vii 52-54

have been greatly impressed with this idea. After- CANTO VII
wards, when he reaches the Usurers in Circle VII., he
says, 'Not one of them I knew',¹ he recognized them
only by the coats of arms painted on their money-
bags. In fine, excessive love of money destroys
individuality—that special difference of man from
man which makes recognition possible. The sordid
herd of money-makers grow as like as penny to
penny, or rather, the original and individual stamp
is worn away, like coins too long in circulation in the
markets of the world.

Finally, Dante tells us that at the Resurrection the
bodies of these sinners will bear the marks of their
earthly life.

Their Resur-
rection Body
the 'closed
fist' and
'tresses
shorn'

'These from the sepulchre shall rise again

With the fist closed, and these with hair shorn off'²

Obviously the closed fist is the sign of the Misers,
and the shorn hair of the Prodigals, though the latter
is not easy to understand. Vernon thinks the idea
is that 'he who throws his life away, and does not
use it either for his wants or his good name, is like
one shorn of his hair, which is given as a natural
adornment',³ but this seems forced. It is much
more probable that Dante wishes to mark the
extreme to which the prodigal temper will go:
these spendthrifts had not only squandered all their
property, but had, so to speak, sold their very hair
to gratify their passion for giving. There is, indeed,

¹ *Inf* xvii 54

² *Inf* vii 56, 57. The same reference to shorn tresses occurs in *Purg*
xxii 46

³ *Readings on the Inferno*, i 218 n

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CANTO VII — an Italian proverb which speaks of a prodigal as one who 'squanders even to his hair' The point of interest, however, is Dante's conviction that our very bodies in the world to come will bear the brands of the master-passion we have served here. The 'closed fist' and the 'shorn hair' represent to his mind the natural and inevitable correspondence of the 'spiritual body' to the spiritual state, the character which the earthly life has wrought within the soul

**Fortune and
her Wheel**

The restless doom of these shades suggests a discourse on Fortune and her Wheel, a subject which seems to have had a peculiar fascination for mediæval minds.¹ As they watch the ceaseless tides of hoarding and spending meet and break like billows on Charybdis, Virgil says to Dante

'Now canst thou, Son, behold the transient farce
Of the goods that are committed unto Fortune,
For which the human race each other buffet'

Whereupon Dante puts to him the question.

'What is this Fortune which thou hintest of,
That has the world's goods so within its clutches?'

The word 'clutches' indicates clearly enough Dante's own view. To him Fortune was a kind of wild beast, a cruel, arbitrary force like the heathen Fate, in whose claws man lies helpless. There was, in truth, in his own fortunes and misfortunes much to justify such a belief, and there was certainly a time when he regarded the distribution of this world's goods as based upon no principle of justice. In the *Convito* he writes of riches 'I say that their imperfection

¹ *Inf.* vii 61-96

can be observed firstly in the indiscriminateness of CANTO VII
 their coming, in which no distributive justice shines
 forth, but perfect iniquity almost always' He pro-
 ceeds to prove that whether riches come by chance,
 as in the discovery of hidden treasures, or by succe-
 sion or will, or by work, whether lawful or unlawful,
 they come oftener to the wicked man than to the
 good.¹ In short, Dante was assailed when he wrote
 the *Convito* by that doubt which finds its highest
 expression in the Book of Job—doubt of the justice
 of God, in face of the sufferings of the good and the
 prosperity of the wicked In the passage before us
 he avails himself of the opportunity of retracting
 his earlier opinion, for which Virgil gives him a
 sharp rebuke

'O creatures imbecile,
 How great is that ignorance which makes you stumble!
 Now will I have thee learn my judgment of her'

And his judgment—the judgment of Reason—is this 'Fortune' is
 Fortune, so far from being some wild beast of Chance Providence
 or Fate, is 'a general mistress and guide' appointed
 by God over all earthly things. As He set the various
 orders of angels over the heavenly bodies to the end
 that the light may be equally distributed, and 'every
 part to every part may shine,'² so he set Fortune
 over 'the worldly splendours' for the same purpose
 of impartial distribution

'That she might change betimes the empty goods
 From people to people, and from one blood to another,
 Beyond the resistance of all human wisdom

¹ *Conv* iv 11

² For the Angelic Hierarchies and their relation to the Nine Heavens,
 see *Convito*, bk. ii., particularly chap. vi, and *Par* xxviii

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CANTO VII

Therefore one people rules and another languishes,
In pursuance of the decree of her,
Which hidden is, as in the grass the serpent '

As a god she rules her kingdom, inscrutable to human wisdom, incessant and swift in her changes. Cursed by those who ought to praise her, she heeds it not, but turns her sphere and with bliss fulfils her appointed task. This is an obvious personification of the Christian idea of Providence, indeed, in the *De Monarchia*, it is expressly said that Fortune is better and more rightly called the Providence of God¹. What men call Fortune is neither a blind Chance nor an iron Fate. The tides of prosperity and adversity ebb and flow at the bidding of One 'whose wisdom transcends all,' and every fluctuation of Fortune works out some blissful end. It is the conclusion reached by Boethius in his *Consolation of Philosophy*, which it is evident was much in Dante's mind when writing this passage. After a long discussion, Boethius argues that 'all fortune is good,' and 'for this reason a wise man should never complain, whenever he is brought into any strife of fortune, just as a brave man cannot properly be disgusted whenever the noise of battle is heard, since for both of them their very difficulty is their opportunity,—for the brave man of increasing his glory, for the wise man of confirming and strengthening his wisdom . . . It rests in your own hands what shall be the nature of the fortune which you choose to form for yourself. For all fortune which seems difficult, either exercises virtue, or corrects or

¹ *De Mon* ii 10

punishes vice. . . When the earth is overcome, the stars are yours.'¹ It is worth while noting that Dante's 'first friend,' Guido Cavalcanti, has a *Song of Fortune* so like the passage before us that, as Longfellow says, 'one might infer that the two friends had discussed the matter in conversation, and afterwards that each had written out their common thought' It is too long to quote entire, but the verse may be given in which the poet rebukes the complaints against Fortune to which Dante refers

'Ye make great marvel and astonishment
 What time ye see the sluggard lifted up
 And the just man to drop,
 And ye complain on God and on my sway
 O humankind, ye sin in your complaint
 For He, that Lord who made the world to live,
 Lets me not take or give
 By mine own act, but as He wills I may
 Yet is the mind of man so castaway,
 That it discerns not the supreme behest
 Alas! ye wretchedest,
 And chide ye at God also ' Shall not He
 Judge between good and evil righteously?''²

¹ *De Consolatione*, bk. iv

² Rossetti's Translation in *Dante and his Circle*, 168 171

CHAPTER VIII

CIRCLE V.—STYX THE WRATHFUL AND THE SULLEN

CANTOS
VII 100—
VIII 64
—
Incontinence
of Temper

WE have seen Incontinence in two forms—non-control of body and of goods, we now go deeper into human nature and reach the more spiritual form of non-control of temper. The very hour hints that we are approaching a darker evil: the stars are sinking—it is past midnight. Further, the whole scenery changes, to indicate that we have come to another order of sin. Down to this point the pilgrims were moving on a series of terraces, ranged one beneath the other, like the tiers of an amphitheatre. Now they reach the second of the great rivers of the lost world. On the inner edge of the Circle of Avarice, they come upon a fountain of dark and boiling waters, which pour down a channel which they have wrought for themselves, and spread out into the great Marsh of Styx. In the centre of this Stygian fen rise the walls and towers of the City of Dis, to which it forms a vast moat. In this Marsh are punished two forms of sinful Anger: hot, passionate anger, quick to lift the hand, and sulky, sullen, melancholy resentment. The former, as the lighter sin, is punished on the surface of the fen, the latter, in the mire at the bottom.

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The Marsh of Styx is an obvious symbol of the sin of this Circle. Dante tells us that the boiling spring which formed it was in colour 'darker far than perse,' and elsewhere he says 'perse is a colour composed of purple and black, but the black predominates.'¹ We can scarcely be mistaken in seeing in the boiling spring the boiling of angry passions, and in the black waters the way in which those passions darken and defile the pure stream of life. In the *Purgatorio* we find Anger punished by a fog which bites and blinds the eyes, symbolic of the way in which angry passions cloud and distort the reason.² Here too there is a fog which rises as an exhalation from the fen, but also there is inflicted a more terrible blindness, represented by the mire into which the souls are plunged

CANTOS
VII 100-
VIII 64

—
River and
Marsh of
Styx Symbol
of the Sin

As we saw, the quick passionate form of Anger is punished on the surface of the Marsh. From 'the grey malignant shores' the travellers see the souls of the Wrathful smiting each other with hands and head, breast and feet, and even tearing one another in pieces with their teeth. Their punishment is threefold. In the first place, they are obviously abandoned to their own passions on earth for a lifetime they gave them free rein, and now they are completely beyond their control and rage on in intensified fury. In the second place, the mire blinds them. 'The anger of zeal,' says Gregory, 'troubles the eye of reason, but the anger of vice quite blinds it.' And finally, the mire defiles as well as blinds. Dante calls the souls here 'a muddy

Anger
punished on
the Surface
of Styx

¹ *Conv* iv 20

² *Purg* xv 142-xvi 15

CANTOS
VII 100
VIII 64
—

people,' and says that they 'gorge the mud.' He is probably thinking of the foul language with which the passion of anger fills the mouth Aquinas says 'the daughters of Anger' are six. 'brawling, swelling of spirit, contumely, clamour, indignation, and blasphemy'; indeed he goes further, declaring that 'irascibility is the gate of all vices when that is shut, rest will be given to the virtues within when that is open, the spirit will sally forth to the commission of all crime'¹

Yet, strange to say, in the very act of condemning this sin, the poet himself seems to give way to it He narrates the following curious incident² We saw that the River Styx when it falls from the Circle above broadens out into a miry lagoon, and that this lagoon must be crossed in order to reach the City of Dis, which it surrounds as a moat. Skirting the edge of the foul fen, the travellers come to a tower from the top of which glow two flames—a signal, as they afterwards learn, to the Ferryman of the Marsh, that two souls await passage Far across the lagoon it is answered by a single flame, and almost immediately through the fog of the morass a very little boat with one pilot shoots towards them, like arrow from the bow The Ferryman is Phlegyas, a figure taken from Greek mythology, which makes him the father of Ixion and grandfather of the Centaurs, the symbols of Violence in the Seventh Circle The story is that, enraged at Apollo for the ruin of his daughter Coronis, he burnt the temple of the god at Delphi, and was

Phlegyas
Symbol of
Wrath

¹ *Summa*, II II q cxiiv a 6, 7

² *Inf* VIII 164

THE WRATHFUL AND SULLEN 129

thereupon slain and consigned to Hades. His name means the Fiery One, and he is plainly a symbol of Wrath, fit pilot of the Marsh of Wrath. Probably, too, Dante meant him to act as Guardian of the approach to the City of Dis. Virgil, in the *Æneid*, says Æneas heard him in Hades warning the shades with a loud voice to 'learn justice and not to condemn the gods';¹ and as injustice and contempt of God are the sins punished in the City of Dis, Phlegyas is appropriately set here to guard the approach to it. His first word as he draws near in his boat is one of angry disappointment 'Now art thou arrived, fell soul?'—soul, not souls. The double signal-flame had led him to expect two, and his first glance seems to have informed him that one was still alive. When Virgil tells him that neither of them is doomed to remain in his power, his anger is changed into a sullen fury, as of one who has been made the victim of some great deception.

CANTOS
VII 100—
VIII 64

As they are being ferried over 'the dead pond,'^{Flippo} suddenly a spirit all bemired rises in front of them,^{Argenti.} demanding—'Who art thou that comest ere the hour?' Dante in turn demands who *he* is who has become so foul, and receives the evasive answer, 'Thou seest I am one who weeps.' His effort to conceal his identity is vain through all the defilement of the mud the poet recognizes him and orders him away with indignation. So far from ^{Dante's Anger.} obeying, the lost soul in a frenzy of anger attempts to climb into the boat to drag Dante out, and is only prevented by Virgil, who flings him off contemptu-

¹ *Æn* vi 618 620

CANTOS
VII. 100-
VIII. 64
—

ously: 'Away there with the other dogs!' And then, clasping his arms round Dante's neck and kissing his face, he exclaims.

'Disdainful soul,

Blessed be she that bore thee!'—

the one reference in the whole poem to either of his parents Whereupon Dante goes still further in his disdainfulness, declaring it would please him much to see this arrogant soul 'soused' in the 'broth' of the lake Soon he had his wish

A little after that I saw such havoc
Made of him by the muddy people,
That still I praise and thank my God for it
They all were shouting—'At Filippo Argenti!
And that exasperate spirit Florentine
Turned round upon himself with his own teeth
We left him there, and more of him I tell not

Our first impression is undoubtedly that this outburst of anger and gloating over the wretch's sufferings is scarcely worthy of the poet it certainly looks as if he was becoming infected with the infernal temper of the Marsh It is obvious, however, that Dante himself has no consciousness whatever of any such deterioration On the contrary, his evident aim is to set in strong contrast noble anger and ignoble, to show that there are occasions when it is possible to 'be angry and sin not' Aristotle had taught him that 'people look foolish if they do not grow angry on the right occasions or in the right way.'¹ This he regarded as one of these occasions, and therefore it is that Virgil,

¹ *Ethics*, IV 111.

who is Reason personified, breaks out into praise, not only of his anger, but of its disdainfulness. This Filippo Argenti was a member of the noble Florentine family of the Adimari, and it has been suggested that this is the explanation of Dante's bitterness towards him. The Adimari were among his most implacable enemies in Florence; indeed, it is said that one member of the family, Boccaccio by name, gained possession of Dante's property on his exile, and therefore opposed his recall. It is but natural that this should add a touch of bitterness to his judgment of Filippo, nevertheless there is no reason to suppose that it created that judgment. It is far too common an idea that Dante used the *Inferno* vindictively as a convenient way of taking vengeance on his personal enemies. In the present case, there can be no doubt that the Adimari were his enemies, and that he had the bitterest contempt for them. In the *Paradiso*, for example, he calls them

'The insolent race, that plays the dragon
After whose fleeth, and to whose showeth tooth—
Or purse—is gentle as a lamb'¹

But we should remember that Dante wrote these words very shortly after he had been solemnly warned of the danger of pronouncing rash moral judgments upon his fellow-men, and we have no right to assume that he deliberately despised the warning the next moment.² This Filippo, according to the old commentators, was a man of overbearing and violent temper, disdainful of his fellows, pro-

CANTOS
VII 100
VIII 64
—

¹ *Par.* xvi 115-117

² *Par.* xiii 130-142

CANTOS
VII. 100-
VIII 64

voked by a straw into fits of fury, and so purse-proud that he gained his nickname of Argenti by having his horse shod with silver. Dante's obvious intention is to make us understand that there is a righteous anger which rejoices to see a man like this repaid in kind—anger with anger, scorn with scorn, violence with violence. Virgil assures him that this recoil of their own arrogance upon themselves will be the doom of many of the great ones of the earth

‘How many hold themselves up there great kings,
Who here shall be like swine in mire,
Leaving horrible dispraises of themselves behind’

To pity such high-handed sinners would be irrational indignation is the only emotion in harmony with right reason, and Dante had learned from Aquinas that the man incapable of righteous anger is far from guiltless: ‘If one is angry according to right reason, then to get angry is praiseworthy . . . The absence of the passion of anger is as much a vice as is the failure of the movement of the will to punish according to the judgment of reason. He who is totally devoid of anger when he ought to be angry, imitates God indeed in respect of the absence of passion, but not in respect of this, that God punishes on principle’¹ Down to this Circle Virgil has permitted pity as a legitimate and reasonable feeling, but from this point onward he sternly rebukes it. We have now reached a depth and heinousness of sin for which the only rational thing is a holy indignation, or at least a stern acquiescence in the

¹ *Summa*, ii ii q. clviii a 1, 8

THE WRATHFUL AND SULLEN 183

righteous judgments of God. Dante had little of the flabby modern sentimentality which regards all sinners as mere victims to be pitied

CANTOS
VII 100-
VIII 64

When we turn to the second class of sinners The Sad,
punished in this Circle, we find considerable contro- Sullen,
versy as to what precisely they are Slothful
As the pilgrims skirt the margin of the Marsh, Virgil points out to Dante the bubbles which rise everywhere on the surface of the water, and informs him that they are made by a doleful 'hymn' which souls fixed in the mire below gurggle in their throats

'Fixed in the slime they say "Sad were we
In the sweet air which by the sun is gladdened,
Bearing within ourselves the slothful smoke
Now are we sad in the black mire"'¹

Some commentators, on the strength of the words 'slothful smoke' (*accidioso fummo*), regard the sin as that of Sloth (*Accidia*), identifying it with that punished on the Fourth Cornice of Purgatory. Others, laying the emphasis on the sadness of these sinners, take their sin to be, as Dr Moore says, 'a type or species of anger, viz., sullen, suppressed, or sulky anger, a gloomy, resentful, discontented disposition, refusing to rejoice in the bright sunshine, and other occasions of happiness and contentment in this upper world'. Dr Moore thinks, I have no doubt rightly, that Dante had in mind Aristotle's distinction between sullenness and other forms of anger of a more explosive kind.² It is an anger into which enter both sloth and sadness, as Dante plainly indicates. In this, indeed, he is simply following

¹ *Inf* vii 117-126

² *Studies in Dante*, second series, 175

CANTOS
VII 100-
VIII 64

Aquinas. 'Sloth,' he says, 'is a heaviness and sadness, that so weighs down the soul that it has no mind to do anything. It carries with it a disgust of work. It is a torpor of the mind neglecting to set about good. Such sadness is always evil.' He adds that Sloth is a mortal sin because it is contrary to charity. 'for the proper effect of charity is joy in God: while sloth is a sadness at spiritual good, inasmuch as it is divine good.'¹ As the word *acedia* means, it is the feeling of *don't care* a sullen, lazy, angry discontentment which can take an interest in nothing, not even in the shining of the sun. And when we remember where this sin was most prevalent in the Middle Ages, we will not think it an accident that Dante calls the words these sinners 'gurgles in their throats a 'hymn'. An old commentator remarks shrewdly that priests, whose duty it was to chant hymns in church, were so lazy that they would not even stand to sing praises to God, and that they do not pronounce the words articulately, but, as Dante says, gurgle them in their throats. Bishop Martensen says this weariness of life, called *acedia* in the Middle Ages, was 'a state of soul that often occurred in monasteries, that is, in such as gave themselves to a one-sidedly contemplative life, without having the power or the calling for it, and who were filled with a disgust of all things, even of existence, while even the highest religious thoughts became empty and meaningless to them.'² Lecky, in his *History of European Morals*, affirms that 'most

¹ *Summa*, II-II q. xxxv a 1, 3

² *Christian Ethics* (Individual), p 378. See discourse on 'Accidie' in Chaucer's *The Parson's Tale*

THE WRATHFUL AND SULLEN 185

of the recorded instances of mediæval suicides in Catholicism were by monks,' and traces them to this *acedia*, 'a melancholy leading to desperation.' It is by no means unlikely that this is what Dante hints at in the word 'hymn': it is the somewhat sullen, morose, and melancholy lack of interest in anything, to which men are specially liable who embrace the religious life, without having any true vocation for it.¹

CANTOS
VII 100-
VIII. 64
—

The punishment which Dante assigns to this sin is by no means so arbitrary or fantastic as it may at first glance look. On earth they darkened for themselves the sweet air made gladsome by the sun, with 'the slothful smoke' of their sad and sullen temper, and now the 'smoke' has intensified into black mire, in which they are embedded throughout eternity. In other words, a lifelong habit of morose and melancholy refusal to see the sunshine which exists even in the darkest lot, may well become at last the fixed and unalterable temper of the soul. It reminds us of words from the *Wisdom of Solomon*, which perhaps were in Dante's mind 'For the whole world shined with clear light, and none were hindered in their labour. over them only was spread an heavy night, an image of that darkness which should afterward receive them but yet were they unto themselves more grievous than the darkness.'² We can scarcely doubt that Dante had a personal interest in thus vividly realizing to himself the

Punishment
fixed in the
Mire of Styx

¹ Alban Butler in his *Life of St Bruno* says 'Gaiety of soul (which always attends virtue) is particularly necessary in all who are called to a life of perfect solitude, in which nothing is more pernicious than sadness'

² Chap xvii 20, 21

CANTOS
VII. 100-
VIII. 64
—

doom of such souls, when we remember that his own circumstances must have been a constant temptation to him to give way to this sad and sullen spirit. Exiled from his native city, accused of a disgraceful crime, learning by long and bitter experience

‘how savoureth of salt
The bread of others, and how hard a road
The going down and up another’s stairs,’¹

Dante yet seems to have kept within his breast a heart open to the sunshine ‘Can I not everywhere behold the mirrors of the sun and of the stars?’² he asks in his letter of indignant refusal to return to Florence on conditions which were an insult to an innocent man. In the *Convito*, he sets it down as one of the marks of noble Age that it looks back with joy upon an active and well-spent life. ‘And the noble soul blesses also at this age the times past, and well may she bless them, because, revolving them in memory, she remembers her upright works, without which she could not come to the port to which she draws near, with so great riches nor with so great gain. And she does as the good merchant, who, when he comes near to his port, examines his cargo, and says, If I had not passed through such a road, I should not have this treasure, and I should not have that wherewith I shall rejoice in my city, to which I am approaching, and therefore he blesses the journey which he has made’³

¹ *Par* xvii 58-60

² *Epis* ix 4

³ *Conv.* iv 28

CHAPTER IX

CIRCLE VI.—THE CITY OF DIS HERETICS

1 *The Narrative*

WE come now to one of the most difficult parts of the whole poem,—so difficult, indeed, that Dante interrupts the narrative to warn the reader that it needs a sound intellect to discern the doctrine concealed ‘beneath the veil of the mysterious verses’ It may be well, therefore, to have the narrative clearly before our minds before we attempt the interpretation

CANTOS
VIII 65-X

Incontinence
of Intellect

When they have rid themselves of Filippo Argenti, there smites on Dante's ear a lamentation which causes him to peer eagerly across the Stygian Fen, to discover whence it came Virgil informs him that they are drawing near to the City of Dis, with its ‘sin-laden citizens’ Already Dante sees its mosques glowing red-hot in the valley below the word ‘mosques’ being chosen probably to indicate that it was a city of infidels When they come nearer, they find that it is defended by deep moats and walls of iron the description being obviously taken from that of Tartarus in Book VI of the *Æneid*. After a long circuit, their Ferryman lands them at the gates, but their entrance is fiercely opposed by

The City of
Dis

CANTOS
VIII 65-X

Its Garrison of
Rebel Angels.

more than a thousand of the rebel angels—'those out of heaven rained down' They are indignant that one 'without death' should dare to travel through the kingdom of the dead. At a sign from Virgil that he desires to speak with them secretly, they somewhat modify their disdain, declaring, however, that he must remain with them, while Dante 'returns alone by his mad way' On hearing this, the poet is thrown into an agony of fear, and begs his guide to retrace his steps to the upper world. Virgil, after consoling him with a promise to see him safely through the pilgrimage, leaves him for the moment to hold parley with the fiends at the gate, and during his absence Dante endures a great conflict of doubt—the *Yes* and the *No*, as he puts it, contending in his head

The Closing of
the Gates on
Virgil

The parley, however, is unsuccessful the fiends, who at first wished Virgil to remain with them, now rush back into the city and close the gates in his face Crestfallen, with downcast eyes and slow footsteps, he returns to where his companion waits, and assures him that the repulse can be only for the moment A messenger from Heaven is already on his way through the upper Circles, who will open this gate, even as Christ opened the outer gate of Hell, which ever since has remained without a fastening While Virgil waits for this heavenly messenger, listening and peering through the thick fog of the Fen, he keeps murmuring broken doubtful phrases, to which Dante's fears impart a worse interpretation than is meant To ease his mind, he asks Virgil if any of the souls in the Limbo of the

First Circle to which he belonged, had ever penetrated into 'this bottom of the doleful shell,' as he calls the narrowing cone of the Inferno. His guide assures him that he himself had been over the ground before. Shortly after his death he had been sent by the Thessalian sorceress, Erichtho, to bring a soul up from the Circle of Judas, the lowest in Hell, and that, having made the journey once, Dante need not fear that his guidance would now fail. It is not known to what this refers, perhaps, as some suggest, it is only a kindly fiction invented to quiet Dante's fears. Much more probably it is some lost mediæval legend of Virgil, whom tradition had long invested with all the powers of wizardry.

CANTOS
VIII 65-X

Dante tells us that he missed whatever else Virgil may have said, because at this moment a dreadful vision caught his eye. On the red-flaming summit of the tower, there rose the three infernal Furies—Megæra, Alecto, and Tisiphone—women in form, blood-stained, girt with hydras, and their temples entwined with serpents for tresses. Tearing and beating their breasts, they cry

The Tower of
the Furies

'Come, Medusa, so we will change him into stone!'

Medusa

In a moment Virgil turns Dante away, blinding his eyes with his own hands, lest he should be tempted to take one glance at the dread Gorgon's head.

As he stands thus blinded, Dante hears across the waves of the Stygian Lake a sound of terror, as when a mighty wind smites the forest, rending the branches and scattering the wild beasts and shepherds. Removing his hand from his eyes, Virgil

The Messenger
from Heaven.

CANTOS
VIII 65-X

bids him look out across the Fen to the point where the fog is thickest, and there he sees One walking, like Christ upon the waves, with unwet foot, while before him 'more than a thousand ruined souls' fled like frogs before the serpent. The only sign of weariness he showed was that with his left hand he waved away the clinging exhalations of the Marsh. In his other hand he carried a light rod, with which, unresisted by the garrison, he opened the gate of Dis. Then, having rebuked with words of high disdain the insolence of the fiends, without so much as a glance at either Dante or Virgil, he passed whence he came, as one bent on other cares. No hint is given of the identity of this messenger. We may dismiss the conjecture that he was Mercury or Æneas. Since his errand is to subdue the rebel angels, he is much more likely to be Michael, the archangel who conquered them in the great war in Heaven. All that Dante says is

Well I perceived one sent from Heaven was he

The City of
Burning
Tombs

There is no further opposition to their entrance. When they pass inside the walls, not one citizen is visible. It is a city of the dead, and their sepulchres make the plain uneven. Between the tombs, flames are scattered which heat them like iron in a furnace. A midnight walk through the Black Country of the Midlands, as one says, would in part reproduce the scene. Virgil explains that the souls within the tombs, whose lamentations fill the air, are Heresiarchs and their disciples of all sects, that like is buried with like, and that the sepulchres are heated

more or less according to the guilt. Then turning to the right—one of the few times in Hell—they take their way between the tombs and the high walls

CANTOS
VIII 65-X

This 'secret path' leads them through that part of the cemetery where are buried Epicurus and his followers, 'who make the soul die with the body.' Dante may have singled out this denial of immortality as the fundamental heresy, striking, as it does, at the natural basis of religion. In the *Convito* he says that, 'of all the bestialities, that is the most stupid, most vile, and most damnable, which believes no other life to be after this life'¹. He affirms emphatically his own personal certainty of immortality 'I believe, affirm, and am certain, that after this I shall pass to another better life—there where that glorious Lady lives, of whom my soul was enamoured'. As they pass on, Dante is very anxious to have at least one glance into the tombs to see their tenants, and, as if to gratify his desire, a soul suddenly rises breast-high and addresses him. He had heard him speaking his native Tuscan, and desired news of his Fatherland. It is the soul of Farinata degli Uberti, a famous Florentine noble, once Leader of the Ghibelline army. Even his fiery tomb had been powerless to burn out the old imperious spirit of the man

Farinata degli
Uberti

He rose erect with breast and brow,
As if even Hell he held in great disdain

With all his old earthly pride of birth, he demands

¹ *Conv* II 9 *Comp Eccles* III 18 21

⁴ *Inf* X 35, 36

CANTOS
VIII. 65-X

Father of
Guido Caval-
canti

almost contemptuously Dante's ancestry, lest by any chance he should bemean himself by conversing with a mere plebeian. On being told, he recognizes Dante's forefathers as Guelphs, and therefore his enemies twice he had defeated and driven them into exile. Dante retorts that both times they had returned—an art which Farinata's family had not yet learned. It was a foolish boast for an exile who himself had not learned the art of returning, but before the Ghibelline chief can make the obvious retort, the conversation is suddenly interrupted by a second soul, who rises on his knees in the same tomb as far as the chin, and peers round Dante as if searching for some one whom he expected to find with him. For a moment the poet does not recognize him, but his first question reveals his identity.

‘ If through this blind
Prison thou goest by loftiness of genius,
Where is my son? and why is he not with thee? ’

It was another Florentine, Cavalcante de' Cavalcanti, a Guelph, and father of Dante's most intimate friend, the poet Guido Cavalcanti. Dante's reply is

‘ Of myself I come not
He who waits yonder, through here leads me,
Whom perhaps your Guido had in disdain ’

The past tense *had* strikes ominously on the father's ear; starting up in alarm, he cries

‘ How
Saidst thou—*he had*? lives he not still? ’
Does not the sweet light strike upon his eyes? ’

Then, mistaking a momentary hesitation on Dante's

part in replying, he fears the worst, and falls back into his fiery tomb to rise no more.¹

CANTOS
VIII. 65-X

It is far from easy to say what lies behind this incident. Obviously Cavalcante regarded his son as Dante's equal in genius, and he seems to have had some reason for expecting to find him as his companion in this great pilgrimage. One is almost tempted to think we have here a hint that the two friends had discussed the subject together, and intended to write it out in some kind of collaboration. Plainly something broke up their friendship, and they went their different ways in poetry and philosophy, religion and life. Dante indicates here the cause of the estrangement—Guido's disdain of Virgil. What form this disdain took can only be conjectured. Plumptre thinks he preferred the Provençal poets to the *Æneid*. According to Rossetti, the disdain arose from his 'strong desire to see the Latin language give place, in poetry and literature, to a perfected Italian idiom'.² As a Guelph, Virgil's Imperialism may have been an offence to him. Rightly or wrongly, he was credited with heretical opinions. In the *Decameron*, Boccaccio says of him 'Also because he held somewhat of the opinion of the Epicureans, it was said among the vulgar sort that

Estrangement
of Dante and
Guido.

¹ *Inf* x 52-72. Aristotle (*Ethics*, i 11) discusses how far the fortunes of their descendants affect the dead. His conclusion is that they are affected 'by honours and dishonours, and by the successes or reverses of their children and then descendants generally,' but not in such fashion as to 'make people happy if they are not happy or to deprive them of their felicity if they are.'

² *Dante and his Circle*, p. 10 n. Dante says in *La Vita Nuova* (xxx1) of Guido Cavalcanti: 'My first friend, for whom I write this, had a similar understanding, namely, that I should write to him only in the vulgar tongue.'

CANTOS
VIII 65-X

his speculations were only to cast about whether he might find that there was no God.' It is only fair, however, to Guido to say that there appears to have been another side to the story. In the Sonnet addressed to Dante, quoted on page 8, he states plainly enough that it was something discreditable in Dante's own life and conduct which led to the rupture. A pathetic part of the story is that in 1300, when Dante was one of the Priors of Florence, he and his fellow-magistrates had banished the leaders of both Blacks and Whites,—among the latter Guido, who caught fever in exile, and died in August of the same year. At the ideal date of the *Commedia*—the Easter of 1300—Guido was still alive; and Dante, before passing on, leaves word with Farinata for Cavalcante that 'still his son is with the living joined.'

Farinata and
Florence

The conversation with Farinata is now resumed. The haughty nobleman, absorbed in the fate of his own house, had 'neither moved his neck nor bent his side,' at Cavalcante's outburst of fatherly solicitude, but calmly goes on as if no interruption had taken place.¹ The last thing Dante had said to him was that his family had not learned the art of returning to Florence from their exile. To this taunt Farinata replies that before fifty moons Dante himself will have learned 'how heavy is that art'—probably in reference to the vain attempt of Benedict xi. to secure the return of the exiles in 1304.² The Ghibelline chief then asks Dante why the Florentines are so implacable in their laws against his descendants,

¹ Guido was Farinata's son in law

² *Villani*, viii, 72

and is told that it is in revenge for the part he took in the battle of Montaperti, near Siena, in 1260, when the banished Ghibellines under the leadership of Farinata gained a great victory over the Guelphs and retook Florence. 'After the battle the standard of the vanquished Florentines, together with their battle-bell, the Martinella, was tied to the tail of a jackass and dragged in the dirt' The Guelphs never forgave this insult the Uberti family were expressly excluded from every amnesty granted to the exiles of their party To this day Florence contains a curious memorial of the implacable hatred with which this family was regarded. In 1298 the Florentines began to build the Palace of the Priors, now known as the Palazzo Vecchio 'And,' says Villani, 'they built the said palace where had formerly been the houses of the Uberti, rebels against Florence, and Ghibellines, and on the site of those houses they made a piazza, so that they might never be rebuilt. . . And to the end the said palace might not stand upon the ground of the said Uberti, they which had the building of it set it up obliquely, but for all that it was a grave loss not to build it four-square.'¹ And so, for hatred of this family, the rugged old Palace of the Priors stands slantwise to this day above the Piazza della Signoria, once the site of their homes

Farinata tells Dante that this hatred is unjust. the Florentines should not forget that but for him, and him alone, their city would have ceased to exist

¹ Villani, VIII 26

CANTOS
VIII. 65-X

' But there was I alone, where every one
Consented to the laying waste of Florence,
He who defended her with open face ' ¹

The reference is to a council of the victorious Ghibellines held after the battle of Montaperti, at which the Sienese and Pisan allies urged the complete destruction of Florence, and Farinata was her only defender. In his speech to the council he asked indignantly 'To what does your hatred attach itself? To its houses and insensible walls? To the fugitives who have abandoned it? Or to ourselves who now possess it? Who is he who thus advises? Who is the bold bad man that dare thus give voice to the malice he hath engendered in his soul? Is it meet that all *your* cities should exist unharmed, and ours alone be devoted to destruction? That *you* should return in triumph to your hearths, and we with whom you have conquered should have nothing in exchange but exile and the ruin of our country? Is there one of you who can believe that I could even hear such things with patience? Are you indeed ignorant that if I have carried arms, if I have persecuted my foes, I still have never ceased to love my country, and that I never will allow what even our enemies have respected, to be violated by your hands, so that posterity may call *them* the saviours, *us* the destroyers of our country? Here then I declare that although I stand alone among the Florentines, I will never permit my native city to be destroyed, and if it be necessary for her sake to die a thousand deaths, I am ready to meet them all in her defence ' ²

¹ *Inf* x 91 93

² Napier's *Florentine History*, i 257 259

We see here something of that fair-mindedness for which Dante too seldom gets credit. This haughty Ghibelline nobleman had fought against his Guelph forefathers and scattered them, but it is no hereditary hatred that makes him consign him to Hell. His sin is Heresy, the denial of the immortality of the soul—in Dante's regard 'the most stupid, most vile, and most damnable of all bestialities.' Nevertheless, heretic as he is, and enemy of the poet's forefathers, this lost soul must get full credit for whatever good was in him,—his patriotism and his undaunted defence of his native city when all others cried for her destruction. Even in his fiery tomb this love of their common Fatherland invested him in the poet's eyes with nobility and honour: he calls him 'magnanimous,' great-minded even in Hell. When we remember the treatment he himself received from Florence, we shall the better appreciate the generosity which moved Dante to record the courageous act by which Farinata saved her. Indirectly it is an appeal to the Florentines for more generous treatment of the long-banished family of the Uberti. Even Villani, who was a Guelph, accuses his city of ingratitude to the 'good man and citizen' who saved it from destruction 'in despite of the forgetfulness of the ungrateful people,' he says, 'we ought to commend and keep in notable memory the good and virtuous citizen, who acted after the fashion of the good Roman Camillus of old'¹

Before passing on to the interpretation, there is one name here which may well claim our attention,

¹ *Villani*, vi 81

CANTOS
VIII. 65-X

though it is mentioned in the most incidental way : that of the Emperor, Frederick II, son of Henry VI. of Suabia, and grandson of Barbarossa. At Dante's request, Farinata tells him something of his fellow-sufferers in the burning tomb

‘ With more than a thousand here I lie,
Within here is the second Frederick,
And the Cardinal, and of the rest I speak not ’—

‘ The
Cardinal. ’

The Emperor,
Frederick II

perhaps because the haughty nobleman disdained to speak of any but his peers ‘ The Cardinal ’ is identified with Ottaviano degli Ubaldini, also a Ghibelline, to whom the saying is attributed, ‘ If there is a soul, I have lost mine a thousand times for the Ghibellines ’ Villani relates that he alone in the Papal Court rejoiced when the news of the defeat of the Guelphs at Montaperti reached Rome¹ But our chief interest gathers round the remarkable figure of ‘ the second Frederick ’ It is more than strange to find him introduced in this abrupt and incidental way One can imagine how magnificent and memorable the incident might have been, had Dante chosen to make the great Emperor, whom men called *stupor mundi*, rise side by side with Farinata in his burning tomb, and, like him, make his apologia It is, indeed, difficult to believe that the idea never presented itself to Dante's mind, for we must remember that, though thus casually named here, Frederick and his house occupy a very prominent place in Dante's writings After a fashion of which he was fond, he distributes various members of this imperial family throughout the three divisions of the other world,

¹ Villani, vi 80

as if to emphasize the truth that the closest ties of flesh and blood cannot unite those whom spiritual character sets asunder. While Frederick burns here in Dis, his mother, Constance, shines in the Moon, the first Heaven of Paradise¹ His son, Manfred, speaks to Dante on the shores of Mount Purgatory, taking care, however, to trace his descent, not from his lost father, but from his grandmother in bliss.

CANTOS
VIII. 65-X
—

‘ I am Manfredi,
The grandson of the Emperess Costanza ’²

In the *Purgatorio* Charles of Anjou is accused of the murder of Frederick's grandson, Conradin, a mere boy in years. References to Frederick's own life are numerous: the leaden caps with which he is said to have punished traitors, the cruelty by which he drove his Chancellor, Pietro delle Vigne, to suicide, and his wars against the Church in Lombardy. The lifelong struggle which he carried on against the Papacy must have been in Dante's eyes a merit, not a crime, certainly it is not for it that Frederick burns in the City of Dis. Having in a moment of weakness vowed a Crusade against the infidels, he roused the anger of the Pope by his slowness in fulfilling it. ‘ Excommunicated by Gregory IX. for not going to Palestine, he went, and was excommunicated for going having concluded an advantageous peace, he sailed for Italy, and was a third time excommunicated for returning ’³ Perhaps, but for his opposition to Papal supremacy, we would have heard less of his being a heretic. His

¹ *Par.* III. 100-120

² *Purg.* III. 112, 113

³ Bryce's *Holy Roman Empire*, chap. XIII

CANTOS
VIII 65-X
—

whole attitude to religion is mysterious. He was popularly believed to be the author of a work in which Christ, Moses, and Mohammed were held up as the three great religious impostors who had deceived the world.¹ Whether for reasons of state or to escape the charge of heresy, he gave no quarter to heresy in his subjects 'The heretics,' says one of his decrees, 'wish to sever the undivided coat of our Lord, we command that they be delivered to death by fire in the eyes of the people',² and, indeed, it is no more than strict poetic justice that he himself should now be delivered as a heretic to the same fate. Whatever his doctrinal heresy may have been, there seems to be no doubt of his practical Epicureanism. Villani says 'he was dissolute and voluptuous in many ways, and had many concubines and mamelukes, after the Saracenic fashion; he was addicted to all sensual delights, and led an Epicurean life, taking no account of any other and this was one principal reason why he was an enemy to the clergy and the Holy Church'.³ It is difficult to reconcile this and his doom in Hell with Dante's own estimate of Frederick in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia*. 'Those illustrious heroes, Frederick Cæsar and his highly favoured son Manfred, displaying the nobility

¹ 'Strangely enough this famous phrase *de tribus impostoribus*, in spite of its inherent absurdity, has been attributed not only to Averroes, but to at least a dozen eminent *Christian* writers, including Milton, Servetus, Rabelais, Macchiavelli, Boccaccio, and the Emperor Frederic II. Queen Christina of Sweden caused all the great libraries of Europe to be searched in the seventeenth century for any authentic record of the phrase, its authorship, or its origin, but the researches were conducted in vain' (U R Burke's *History of Spain*, 1 211)

² Gregorovius' *Rome in the Middle Ages*, v 162

³ Villani, vi 1

and rectitude of their souls as long as fortune was favourable, followed what is human, disdaining what is brutal; wherefore those who were of noble heart and endowed with graces, strove to attach themselves to the majesty of such great princes.¹ It must be remembered that Dante is here speaking of the literary culture of the Court of Sicily; and also, that, whatever Frederick's sins and heresies may have been, there was something phenomenal about the man himself which appealed powerfully to the poet's imagination. To him he was the last Roman Emperor—his successors were unworthy of that august title. In the *Convito* he speaks of him as 'the last Emperor of the Romans—last, I say, in respect of the present time, notwithstanding that Rudolf and Adolph and Albert have been elected since his death and that of his descendants'² The truth is, he set in motion forces which in course of time dissolved the Empire, and many modern historians regard him as the unconscious forerunner of the Reformation and the Renaissance 'In the extravagant accusations of cruelty, perfidy, and licentiousness with which the Church has assailed his memory there is some nucleus of truth, but a candid judgment will arrive at the conclusion that few exposed to such pernicious influences have shown such a decided preference for goodness and truth, and that there have been almost none who against such immense difficulties have wrought to such wise purpose in behalf of human progress and enlightenment, or have fought such a resolute and advan-

¹ *De Vulg Elog* i 12² *Conv* iv 3, *Par* iii 120

CANTOS
VIII 65-X
—

tageous battle in behalf of spiritual freedom. In this contest he was not an immediate victor; and indeed the dissolution of the imperial power in Italy which followed his death must be chiefly traced to the fact that his policy was governed by principles too much in advance of his age. But although the beneficial results of his reign are not at first glance so palpable and undeniable as some of its injurious results, yet so far was he from being a mere untimely precursor of the new era which dawned in Europe more than two centuries after his death, that, perhaps in a greater degree than any other, he was instrumental in hastening its arrival, both by sowing the first seeds of the Renaissance in Italy, and by giving the old system of things a shock which was felt throughout Europe, and continued to work silently long after its reverberations had passed away.¹ Perhaps if he was thus the forerunner of Luther, he deserved his place here among the Heretics better than even Dante guessed. That he passes such a man by in a single line must surely mean pity for his doom and a wish to screen as much as he can so great a name

¹ *Encyc Brit* (Tenth Edition)—Art. Frederick II

CHAPTER X

CIRCLE VI.—THE CITY OF DIS. HERETICS

2 *The Interpretation*

LET us turn now from the narrative to the more difficult task of interpretation. As we saw, Dante himself warns us that a mystic meaning underlies it

CANTOS
VIII 65-X

Incontinence
of Intellect

O ye who have undistempered intellects,
Observe the doctrine that conceals itself
Beneath the veil of the mysterious verses ¹

The first thing to mark, then, is that this City of Dis forms a transition Circle between upper and nether Hell, and therefore holds certain moral relations to both. Its relation to the upper Circles is that it is a form of Incontinence. We have seen various forms of lack of self-control—in body, in goods, in temper, in this Circle we reach its most spiritual form, in the intellect. Heresy is the refusal to bring 'every *thought* into captivity to the obedience of Christ', it is therefore the deepest, and, in Dante's view, the worst form of Incontinence. As Dr. Moore well points out, however, Dante seems to be thinking here of Heresy, not as a perversion of the intellect pure and simple, but rather as that special perversion of the intellect which flows from,

A Transition
Circle its
Relation to
Upper Hell

¹ *Inf* ix 61-63

CANTOS
VIII 65-X

and issues in, an evil life. The instances named, with the one exception of Pope Anastasius, are not heretics in our modern intellectual sense. Farinata, 'the Cardinal,' Frederick II. are 'Epicurean statesmen or churchmen, who, immersed in the pursuit of the pleasures or ambitions of this world, give no thought to another, until at last they openly adapt their intellectual opinions to the desire of their hearts, and the practice of their lives.'¹ It is, then, that species of heresy Dante is thinking of, which has its source in evil living, as the very position of the *City of Dis* seems to imply. For we must mark carefully where it is set in the midst of a foul fen the waters of which flow down from the Circles above, and form the path by which the soul is borne to the City of Heresy. In other words, the sins of those Circles drain down to this necropolis of infidelity beginning with the flesh, Incontinence eats further and further inward, until it corrupts the intellect itself. A man leads a wild unregulated life, and it is no wonder if all his thoughts concerning religion are thereby thrown into confusion. In time he comes to deny the future life and world because he wishes there were none his creed assumes the shape and colour of his life. 'None deny there is a God,' says Bacon, 'but those for whom it maketh that there were no God.' This intimate connection between heresy and evil-living is figured forth in the draining down of the dark waters of sin from the Circles above, to form the Stygian Fen, across which the soul is floated to the City of Doubt.

¹ *Studies in Dante*, second series, p. 178

The connection with the Circles beneath is, if anything, closer. The name Dis was used by the Romans for Pluto, the King of Hades, and Dante uses it as a synonym for Satan, the Lord of Hell. But in this lost world the natural order of things is turned upside down the Lord of Hell, instead of holding his state in the City above, is bound fast in the dungeons below For this seems to be Dante's idea. the remaining Circles are, so to speak, the city dungeons, and the stair which leads down to them is the broken landship which, as we shall see, descends like a shaft from the valley in the heart of the City. We may be sure that this dreadful construction of nether Hell as the underground dungeons of the City of Unfaith, had some symbolic meaning in Dante's mind, whether we can discover it or not May it not be this, that Heresy forms the natural transition from sins against oneself to sins against others? For the sins in the upper Circles are mainly sins against some part of our own nature, whereas from this downward they are mainly against our neighbours—Violence, Fraud, Treachery The path to these social sins lies through the City of Heresy When a man has thrown off belief in judgment and the world to come, he is ready to descend to the deeper and darker sins the natural fruit of unfaith in God is unfaithfulness to man By the very construction of the Inferno, then, Dante seems to indicate the relation in which the various orders of sin stand to each other. the lighter sins of Incontinence lead to Unfaith, Unfaith in its turn leads to the deeper depths of Violence, Fraud, and Treachery to our fellow-men.

CANTOS
VIII. 65-X

—
Its Relation to
Nether Hell.

CANTOS
VIII 65-X

An Allegory of
Doubt and
Faith

We turn now to a more important part of the allegory—Virgil's conflict with the guardians of the City. And here more than almost anywhere else in the poem we must bear in mind what has been so frequently pointed out, that Virgil stands for human Reason, apart from any special Divine Revelation. His conflict here, therefore, represents the struggle of religious doubt through which Dante's own reason passed as he himself says, referring to Virgil's parleying with the fiends,

Thus onward goes, and here abandons me
The sweet Father, and I remain in doubt,
For the Yes and the No within my head contend ¹

In short, the question proposed is, How far can the unaided Reason of man penetrate into the mysteries of religion, or cope with doubt and infidelity?

The Fortifica-
tions of the
City

The first thing to notice here is that the City of Unbelief is fortified and defended like a mediæval fortress. It has its deep moats, its walls of iron, and its garrison of fiends all of which undoubtedly have some symbolic significance. The common interpretation regards them as indicative of the obstinacy and persistency of heresy, its determination to resist all efforts to convince it, and there is certainly much truth in this. According to Aquinas, obstinacy is a necessary element in heresy, for he says expressly that if a man 'is not pertinacious in his disbelief, he is in that case no heretic, but only a

¹ *Inf.* viii 100 111 In *Par.* xiii 112 114 Dante is warned against overhaste in deciding between Yes and No in Philosophy and Theology

' And let this be ever lead unto thy feet,
To make thee move slowly like a weary man,
Both to the Yes and No thou seest not'

man in error.’¹ The resistance of the fiends to the entrance of the pilgrims represents the unwillingness of unbelief to have its views explored and investigated. It is true, indeed, that men who have flung off their religious faith make a great profession of open-mindedness; nevertheless it is seldom more than a profession. As a rule, they are not open to conviction: they are very much what Dante pictures them, a garrison defending their heresy behind moats and walls and barred gates.

While this interpretation is true so far as the citizens are concerned, a further meaning is involved when we look at the City from the point of view of Dante and Virgil. To them the deep moats, the iron walls, and the garrison of fiends cannot but signify the vast danger and difficulty of penetrating the dark problems of the faith, of exploring the labyrinth of doubt. At first glance, it seems strange that Virgil is entirely unconscious of this difficulty and danger. He evidently expects an entrance at once, and he returns from his parley with the fiends crestfallen at his failure, and muttering angrily, ‘Who has denied to me the dolesome houses?’ Yet all this is perfectly natural and true to experience. In the omniscient days of youth no man dreams that his reason is not equal to all the problems of the universe. We imagine that at a word of Reason’s logic the fiends of Unbelief must vanish, and the gates of the City of Doubt lie open for our victorious feet. It may take many a day and night of baffled weary searching to teach us, as his failure here

¹ *Summa*, 1111 q. v. a. 3

CANTOS
VIII. 65-X

The Garrison
of Rebel
Angels.

taught Virgil, how narrow are the frontiers of the human mind.

It is perhaps worth while pausing to inquire why the garrison of the City of Heresy is composed of the rebel angels, those 'out of Heaven rained down.' It is a question seldom asked, yet it would be interesting to know Dante's reason for assigning to them this particular task. We would naturally expect to find them ranged round their 'Emperor' like a body-guard, in the Circle of Cocytus. Probably the reason why Dante sets them here is to be found in the connection which St. Thomas Aquinas points out between pride and unbelief. It was through pride the angels fell, and the essential nature of pride, says Aquinas, consists in insubordination to God, 'in that one lifts himself above the limit prefixed for him according to the divine rule or measure.' But unbelief is one of the forms which pride assumes, 'for the proud man subjects not his intellect to God, so as to gather the knowledge of the truth from Him', and 'it is precisely by its proceeding from pride, that the sin of unbelief is rendered more grievous than it would be if it arose from ignorance or infirmity'.¹ The intellect of the great angelic Intelligences being far more powerful than that of man, the ruin and perversion of it through the pride of unbelief is correspondingly great and terrible.

¹ *Summa*, in ii q. clix. a. 3, 4, 6. Elsewhere Aquinas says 'Heresy is relegated by the saints outside the number of sins which occur among the faithful, as exceeding such, and therefore it is not reckoned among the capital sins, nor among their offspring. Yet if it must be reduced to some one of the seven capital sins, it may be brought under Pride.' This is why Heresy is not among the sins that are being cleansed away on Mount Purgatory.

Hence the rebel angels are the arch-heretics, and are much more active and powerful than the heretical souls of men. These lie impotent as the dead within their tombs, whereas the greater intellects of Heaven guard the gates of Heresy, and issue forth to challenge the approach of Reason. In Virgil's secret parley with them there may even be a hint that it is from the whispers and suggestions of these great lost Intelligences that the scepticisms and infidelities of mankind originate.

CANTOS
VIII 65-X

In Virgil's conflict with the fiends, there appear to be three distinct stages. The first is the danger that Reason itself may be won over to infidelity. Dante is thrown into terror lest Virgil join the fiends of doubt: he feels his own reason trembling on the verge of heresy. In other words, the first appeal of infidelity—or at all events of rationalism—is to our reason. It declares faith to be irrational at root, and seeks to capture our reasoning powers: 'thou shalt here remain,' say the fiends to Virgil. This is one common beginning of religious doubts: faith is suspected of having no rational basis, and we are called upon—nay, we call upon ourselves—in the name of intellectual honesty, to discard it as the betrayal of our very reason.

Virgil's Con-
flict with the
Fiends of
Heresy

First Stage
Rationalism

The second stage of the struggle swings us to the opposite extreme by a natural revulsion. After all, he must be a narrow and cold-blooded kind of man who can live by logic and reason alone. The mystery of life besets us behind and before and lays its hand upon us, and strange emotions, instincts, and intuitions surge up from some central deep of

Second Stage
Mysticism.

CANTOS
VIII 65-X
—

existence, of which reason can give no account We begin to undervalue reason now as much as formerly we overvalued it We suspect that it has little or nothing to do with the great problems of religion, that they appeal to another part of our nature, and that, being matters of spiritual feeling rather than of the logical understanding, they must simply be taken on faith This revulsion against Reason Dante represents under the figure of the fiends who first wished Virgil to remain with them, now rushing back into their City and clashing the gates in his face It is the stage described by Tennyson

‘If e’er when faith had fall’n asleep,
I heard a voice “believe no more,”
And heard an ever-breaking shore
That tumbled in the Godless deep,

A warmth within the breast would melt
The freezing reason’s colder part,
And like a man in wrath the heart
Stood up and answer’d, “I have felt”

Third Stage
Grace

There is, however, a third stage in which both views are felt to be inadequate—that Reason can decide everything, and that it can decide nothing Reason cannot be finally and for ever baffled however long it may have to wait, it must somehow enter into the City of Heresy at last, and look infidelity in the face But it must first learn its limits, its need of some heavenly aid, some grace Divine The gates of Heresy which resisted all assaults of mere intellect, fly open at one touch of the Angel’s wand, one word of the heavenly wisdom, the fiends of

Unfaith cower and hide themselves, and Reason, CANTOS
VIII 65-X
humbled by its failures, enters in.

In short, this part of the allegory simply repro- The Limita-
tions of
Reason.
duces the idea which pervades the whole poem, and indeed all Dante's works that Reason has its own sphere, though it is strictly limited—Virgil can guide a certain distance, beyond that he must resign his task to a higher wisdom. In the *Convito* Dante says 'There is a limit set to our understanding in each operation thereof, not by us, but by universal Nature, and therefore it is to be known that the bounds of the understanding are wider in thought than in speech, and wider in speech than in signs'¹ In the same book he distinguishes 'three horrible infirmities in the minds of men' 'natural conceit' of intellect, which thinks it knows everything, 'natural pusillanimity,' which thinks it impossible to know anything, and therefore never searches or reasons, and 'levity of nature,' a kind of fantastic idiocy which indeed argues about everything, but flies off from argument to argument, pursuing nothing to its legitimate conclusion² When Dante in the present passage appeals to those who have 'sane intellects,' he is probably thinking of minds which are free from these infirmities, and can therefore give Reason its place and task, however humble It is to be noted too that Dante does not fall into the common error of regarding doubt as Value of
Doubt sinful in itself. On the contrary, it is the path of Nature's own making for the attainment of that final truth in which alone the intellect can per-

¹ *Conv.* III 4

² *Conv.* IV 15

CANTOS
VIII 85-X

manently rest. Hence he says that 'the strife of doubt' springs up at the beginning of the study of Philosophy, in order that we may be driven on by it in our search for the clear truth that lies beyond

'Therefore springs up, in fashion of a shoot,
Doubt at the foot of truth, and it is nature,
Which to the top urges us on from ridge to ridge' ¹

'A little philosophy,' says Bacon, 'inclineth man's mind to Atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to Religion'

The Furies
Guilty Con-
science

In the midst of these intellectual doubts, then—Yes and No contending in his head—Dante tells us that a more awful doubt struck through him, one that pierced to the very root and centre of his moral and spiritual being. It is doubt of the goodness of God, or at least of his own share in that goodness. It came through his vision of the three Furies, as they rose suddenly on the top of the red-flaming tower, and called for Medusa to come and change him into stone. In the Furies, Dante came at last to something of which doubt was impossible. They represent the horror and torment of guilty conscience, and this is one of the few things which, when it is once roused, cannot be doubted away. But this agonized remembrance of past sins creates a terrible doubt, or even despair, of the goodness and mercy of God, and this despair is symbolized by the Medusa's head, which turns men into stone. Despair, says St Thomas, which is the loss of the theological virtue of hope, is more dangerous than the loss of

Medusa
Despair of
God's Mercy

¹ *Par* iv 130 132 *Comp Conv* ii 16

even faith and love, 'because, as it is by hope that we are held back from evil-doing and led on to goodness, so the taking away of hope plunges men headlong into vice, and disgusts them with the labour of doing good. Hence Isidore says "A guilty deed is the death of the soul, but to despair is to go down to hell"'¹ It is for this reason that Virgil immediately turns Dante away and blinds his eyes with his own hands. Even our own reason forbids us to gaze on our sins until they strike us into stone with despair of their forgiveness. In other words, Virgil, the natural Reason of man, without the revelation of the Gospel, can tell us that it is folly and sin to despair of the mercy of God. It is a violation of the very conception of God. To quote St Thomas once more 'The true estimate of the understanding of God is this, that men's salvation comes of God, and that pardon is given to sinners whilst it is a false opinion that He denies pardon to a penitent sinner, or does not convert sinners to Himself by justifying grace. And therefore the movement of despair, which is formed upon a false estimate of God, is vicious and sinful.'²

The utmost, however, that Virgil can do is to turn away the eyes from the Gorgon of Despair, beyond this he must wait for the aid of heavenly grace. No

The Angel
from Heaven.

¹ *Summa*, II II q xx a 3 'Despair comes of a man not hoping that he has any share in the goodness of God'

² *Summa*, II II q xx a 1 It is possible that the Medusa represents the petrifying power of Doubt long indulged in, the way in which it paralyzes our energies. If we take this view, the cry of the Furies for the Gorgon's head will signify that a guilty conscience welcomes Doubt as an anodyne for its pain—glad to doubt out of existence the things which rouse its fear, to petrify the heart into indifference and unbelief

CANTOS
VIII 65-X

hint is given of the identity of the Messenger from Heaven who comes with unwet foot across the filthy fen possibly Dante meant him to remain unknown, to indicate the mysterious way in which Divine grace comes to us in the great crises of the soul At all events, we may set aside the conjecture that the Messenger is either Mercury or Æneas If, however, we take the suggestion made above that he is the Archangel Michael, it would fit in with several details in the narrative It was under the leadership of Michael that the rebel angels were hurled out of Heaven, and it would be natural that he should be sent to subdue this new outbreak of their 'insolence' Further, according to mediæval belief, Michael was the angel of death and judgment, and it is as in a storm of judgment he now appears The souls of the Angry in the fen scatter before him as frogs before the serpent, their base and sinful wrath terrified in the presence of the indignation of God With his left hand he waves aside the thick air of the Marsh, as one weary of the base passions of anger which blind the souls of men like smoke He himself is moved by a storm of anger, but it is holy anger

Ah, how full he seemed to me of indignation!¹

It is, indeed, the only weapon he deigns to use against the fiends, for the wand with which he opens the gate is only the symbol of his authority. He argues no question of the faith with them when unbelief reaches such a height of obstinacy and inso-

¹ *Inf* ix 88

lence, the only argument it can understand is the righteous indignation of Heaven. And, indeed, the mysteries of the City of Heresy can seldom be safely faced 'without anger,' to use Virgil's words,¹ some forms of unbelief must be met, not with argument, but with a certain passion of moral indignation which sweeps them from our path

CANTOS
VIII 85-X

Let us now examine the punishment which Dante assigns to these Heretics. Obviously the tombs in which they lie signify that infidelity is a living death. Faith is no mere luxury of the soul which a man can dispense with if he pleases, it is, as Tolstoy truly calls it, the force by which man lives. The unbelieving soul is entombed in its own unbelief. The sepulchres mean substantially the same as the Medusa's head: unfaith petrifies the soul, paralyzes the energies of life.

Punishment of
Heresy
The Tombs.

It is not so easy to decide the symbolism of the fire, which is used here for the first time as a punishment in Hell. There is no reason to suppose that material fire is meant, for we have seen the other elements, wind, water, earth, used as punishments, but always in some symbolic sense. It is, of course, possible that Dante took the idea from the common doom of heretics in the present world, nevertheless the fire must represent a spiritual pain. These unbelievers who have proudly refused to submit their intellects to God, have thereby lost 'the good of intellect.' Now, the good of intellect, as we have seen, is the perfect vision of God, so far as this is possible to human faculties, but for this, faith is

The Fire

¹ *Inf* ix 33

CANTOS
VIII 65-X
—

absolutely necessary For, as Aquinas says, 'to this vision man cannot arrive except by way of *going to school* to God as his Teacher, according to that saying. "Every one that hath heard of the Father and hath learned, cometh unto me". But every such learner must believe in order to arrive at perfect knowledge as the Philosopher (*ie* Aristotle) says, "The learner must believe" Hence, for man to arrive at the vision of perfect happiness, it is a previous requisite that he believe God, as a scholar believes the master who teaches him'¹ These souls, by refusing faith in God, have lost that vision of Him which is the one and only happiness for which they were created, and, as Dante says elsewhere, 'the loss is most bitter and full of every sorrow.'² In this present world the pain of this loss may never rise to agony, because the loss is not seen in its fulness, but everything may be changed when the soul is thrust forth into a world where it can neither truly believe nor disbelieve It cannot believe, for years of obstinate unbelief have destroyed the very capacity for faith, nor can it disbelieve, for it is now face to face with the eternal things themselves And there, buried in its own powerlessness to believe as in a sepulchre, the loss of the very end and happiness for which it was created, burns through it with an agony as of fire This, at all events, is the serious view taken by Dante of the consequence of losing faith in that God, the knowledge of whom is eternal life

Finally, at the day of judgment the punishment is

¹ *Summa*, II II q II a 3

² *Conv* III 13

increased in two ways · the lids of the tombs which now stand open are closed for ever, and all knowledge comes to an end. In the meantime the souls have knowledge only of the future. Dante was greatly surprised to notice that the father of Guido Cavalcanti did not know whether his son was alive or dead, whereas Farinata was able to foretell certain things in Dante's own fortunes. In reply to the poet's question, Farinata tells him that they have power to see earthly events only while still future when they draw near into the present, they become invisible to them. It follows that when Time shall be no longer—that is, when there is no future—all their knowledge will be, like themselves, 'dead'.¹ Some writers regard this death of knowledge as the doom of all the lost in all the Circles, but it is much more natural to confine it to the citizens of Dis. Their sin was one of intellect, and in the intellect it is punished. The only question is whether Farinata speaks of all the citizens or only of his own sect of Epicureans. If he refers only to those who denied the immortality of the soul, the idea is that, having on earth lived only for the present, now the present is taken from them, and that, having spurned the future, the future is now forced upon their eyes. Probably, however, the punishment includes all within the City walls, since all have sinned in this region of knowledge. On earth they believed themselves so wise that they knew everything by force of their own omniscient intellects, and the punishment of this intellectual arrogance is the gradual

CANTOS
VIII 85-X

Closing of the
Tombs at the
Resurrection

¹ *Inf* x 712, 94 108

CANTOS
VIII 65-X
—

extinction of all knowledge, which Dante symbolizes by the closing of the lids of their tombs to things present and things to come alike 'If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know' 'When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.' One knowledge alone is left, the knowledge of their own past—the eternal contemplation of their blind earthly life and the 'knowledge falsely so called,' through which they lost the knowledge of God which is 'the good of the intellect' We may compare their punishment with that of the Soothsayers in Circle VIII, who, for their presumptuous prying into the future, have their heads turned round and can see no way but backward These despised the present for the future, the Epicureans the future for the present, and both are punished by the loss and ruin of their intellectual life

CHAPTER XI

CIRCLE VI.—CLASSIFICATION OF SINS IN THE INFERNO

WHEN the pilgrims entered the City of Dis, they turned to the right hand, one of the few times when they depart from the leftward movement which is the appropriate symbol of the lost world.¹ The probable meaning is that the problems of heresy are best met by upright conduct 'unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness' Leaving the narrow path that ran immediately inside the walls and parallel with them, they resume their leftward direction, striking straight across the City in order to reach the centre of the valley to which it dips on every side. Here they find an abyss ringed round with broken rocks, which forms the wild and dangerous stairway to the underground dungeons of the City, in which are tortured 'a still more cruel throng.' From the mouth of this pit, as from a volcano, there rises a stench so foul and sickening that they are forced to take refuge behind a great tomb, to grow accustomed to 'the sad blast' before they venture to descend The symbolism is obvious the stench indicates that we have now reached a

¹ Comp the turning to the right toward Geryon, the Guardian of the Circle of Fraud (*Inf* xvii 31)

170 CLASSIFICATION OF SINS

CANTO XI deeper and darker corruption—the sins beneath, as
 — it were, rot human nature, and cannot be faced with-
 out a sickening horror

Tomb of Pope The inscription on the great tomb behind which
Anastasius II Dante and Virgil took shelter ran as follows

‘Pope Anastasius I hold,
 Whom out of the straight way Photinus drew ’¹

The Pope referred to is Anastasius II, who died in 498, though some writers think Dante, misled by a passage in Gratian, mistook him for his contemporary and namesake, the Emperor. The heresy of Photinus, a deacon of Thessalonica, with which this Pope was believed to be tainted, is said to have been the denial of the miraculous conception of our Lord. Whatever uncertainties surround Anastasius and his heresy, however, the important point is that Dante is no believer in the doctrine of Papal infallibility. He ‘wishes all men to know his opinion, that Popes are not exempt from heresy, and that it deserves greater punishment in them than in ordinary men,’—when the fountain-head of the Faith is polluted, the stream which it feeds can hardly be pure.² Hence Anastasius is buried on the very verge of the precipice which overhangs the nether pit; being the spiritual head, he is lower down than, for

¹ *Inf.* xi 89

² A much more remarkable instance is Pope Honorius I (d. 638). The sixth Œcumenical Council (Constantinople, 680) solemnly anathematized him, though more than forty years in his grave, for his leniency towards the heresy of the Monothelites. This condemnation of a Pope for heresy was one of the principal arguments of the opponents of Papal Infallibility at the Vatican Council of 1870. The case was forgotten during the Middle Ages, else Honorius might have borne Anastasius company in this City of Heresiarchs.

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example, the Emperor, Frederick II., who is but the CANTO XI
temporal head of the kingdom of God.

While they are standing in the shelter of the tomb to accustom themselves to the stench of the dungeons beneath, Virgil at Dante's request, that the time might not be lost, gives him a description of the Circles still to be traversed. Over this explanation a vast amount of discussion has taken place, arising in the main from what seems on the surface to be a cross-division of the classification of sins given by Virgil. In lines 22-26 of Canto xi. a classification is given from Cicero, in lines 79-84 what certainly seems to be another classification is given from Aristotle, and the entire discussion springs from the difficulty of setting the two in their right relations to each other. We may lay aside at once the idea that Dante is guilty of a cross-division: he was far too sure and clear a thinker to commit such a blunder. The classification from Aristotle is either capable of being equated with that from Cicero, or it is supplementary to it and introduced for some particular purpose which must not be confounded with the general scheme of classification.

Let us see first what the general scheme is, so far as concerns the Circles yet to come. It is contained in Canto xi 22-26

‘Of every malice which wins hate in Heaven,
Injury is the end, and every such end
Either by force or fraud aggrieveth others
But because fraud is man’s peculiar vice,
More it displeaseth God, and so stand lower
The fraudulent, and more pain assails them’

Virgil's Classi-
fication of
Sins

From Cicero.

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CANTO XI — There can be no doubt that this is taken from Cicero, though his name is not mentioned. In his *Offices*, to which Dante makes many references, Cicero discussing the question of justice says 'Now there are two ways of doing a man an injury the one is by force, the other by fraud The one is the quality of the fox, the other of the lion. They are neither of them proper for a man, but yet fraud is the more odious of the two, and of all injustices, that is the most abominable and capital which imposes upon us under the colour of kindness and good meaning,'¹—*i.e.* into which some element of treachery enters.

Violence

Obviously this is the source of the classification, which Virgil proceeds to explain in detail as follows In Circle VII are punished the Violent, souls that sinned by the use of force They are divided into three classes, according to the object on which their violence spent itself

I The Violent against their Neighbours, either in person or goods tyrants, homicides, marauders, freebooters, incendiaries, and such like

II The Violent against Themselves, also in person or goods This Violence takes two forms Suicide direct and indirect—the indirect consisting of such things as reckless gambling and wanton dissipation of the means of life

III The Violent against God—directly, by denial and blasphemy, and indirectly, by 'disdaining Nature and her bounty' The latter is subdivided into Violence against Nature, of which Sodom is the

¹ *Offices*, bk 1 chap XIII Notice the reference to lion and fox in the confession of Count Guido of Montefeltro in *Inf* xxvii 74, 75 'My deeds were not of the lion, but of the fox'

type, and against Art, represented by the city of CANTO XI
Cahors.

In this division Dante follows the distinction drawn by Thomas Aquinas between 'sin against God, sin against self, and sin against one's neighbour,' though Aquinas takes care to say that these three species of sins are not exclusive of each other 'To sin against God, in so far as the order of relation to God includes every human relation, is common to all sin. but in so far as the order of relation to God goes beyond the other two orders (self and neighbour), in that way sin against God is a special kind of sin'¹

Virgil proceeds to explain Circles VIII. and IX., in *Fraud*, which Fraud is punished Fraud is called 'man's peculiar vice,' evidently because it springs from man's peculiar gift of reason For the possession of reason is that which distinguishes man from the lower animals, and the special guilt of Fraud is that it is the use of this high and distinctive endowment for the injury of others Fraud is of two degrees or qualities, according to the bond and knot of human fellowship which it severs

I Fraud against 'the bond of love which Nature makes.' This is the bond of common humanity, and those who break it by Fraud are punished in Circle VIII, being distributed in ten Moats or Pits, according to their particular form of the sin—hypocrites, thieves, simoniacs, panders, barrators, 'and such like filth.'

II Fraud against a twofold bond this general

¹ *Summa*, I II q lxxii a 4

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CANTO XI one of Nature, and another which creates 'a special faith.' It is at this point that Fraud deepens and darkens into Treachery, which, as a cold-blooded sin, is frozen fast in the lake of ice which constitutes the lowest Circle of Hell beyond this, human depravity cannot go. The souls in 'this bottom of the doleful shell' are divided into four classes according to the 'special faith' they have betrayed Traitors to their Kindred, to their Country, to their Friends and Guests, and last and vilest, to their Lords and Benefactors.

**Principle of
Classification
from Aristotle**

With this account of nether Hell, Dante expresses himself entirely satisfied, but he feels that it leaves unexplained the Circles above through which he has just passed. Why, he asks, are the sinners of those Circles not punished here 'inside of the red city' 'those of the fat lagoon' (the Wrathful and Sullen), 'whom the wind leads' (the Sensual), 'whom the rain beats' (the Gluttons), and 'who encounter with such sharp tongues' (Misers and Prodigals)? Is it because God is not angry with these that they are not inside the City of Dis?—and if so, why are they punished at all? Virgil's answer is that all the sins of Hell are punished according to the order of their hatefulness to Heaven It is at this point that the classification of sins from Aristotle is brought in Virgil rebukes Dante with some sharpness for having forgotten it

' Why wanders so

Thine intellect from that which is its wont?

Or, sooth, thy mind where is it elsewhere looking?

Hast thou no recollection of those words

With which thine Ethics thoroughly discusses

The dispositions three, that Heaven wills not,—

Incontinence, Malice, and insane
Bestialty² and how Incontinence
Less God offendeth, and less blame demands² 1

CANTO XI

The reference is to the opening words of Book vii of the *Nicomachean Ethics* 'There are three species of moral character which ought to be avoided, viz, vice, incontinence, and brutality' It is perfectly obvious that this is introduced, not as a second classification of sins, but simply for the particular purpose of explaining why sins of Incontinence are not inside the City of Dis along with Violence and Fraud sins of impulse and want of self-control are less offensive to God than malicious wickedness and brutality.

Nevertheless, although thus obviously introduced for this special purpose, it is natural to suppose that this classification from Aristotle coincided in Dante's own mind with the other from Cicero, so far as the lower Circles are concerned, in other words, that 'Malice and mad Bestialty' correspond in some fashion to Violence and Fraud There is certainly a strong temptation to identify Brutishness and Violence. In the Circle of the Violent, the various guardians and tormentors, as Wicksteed points out, are either beasts or forms in which the brute mingles with the human the Minotaur, the Centaurs, the Harpies, and the she-mastiffs which tear in pieces the reckless prodigals. This, in a writer like Dante, can scarcely be a mere coincidence, yet the attempt which is sometimes made to include all the forms of Violence in Circle VIII in the Aristotelian concep-

¹ *Inf* xi 76 84

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CANTO XI tion of Brutishness, can scarcely be regarded as successful. On the whole, it is perhaps safer to say that the classification of sins is founded mainly on Cicero, but that the working out of it is strongly coloured with Aristotelian ideas¹

Cahors
Usury

When the explanation is finished, Dante puts to his Guide one final question concerning the sin of Usury

'Once more a little backward turn thee,' said I,
'There where thou sayest that usury offends
The Divine Goodness, and untie the knot.'²

The difficulty is not that Usury is a sin of that the mediæval mind had no doubt. It was that Virgil had declared it a sin *against God*, an offence to the Divine Goodness. Was it not rather a sin against man?—why, then, had Virgil said that it is punished in the Circle of the Violent against God? This reference to Usury is contained in the single word 'Cahors' in line 50 of this Canto. Cahors is a city in the Department of Lot in the South of France, famous, or rather infamous, in Dante's day as a nest of usurers. If Boccaccio is to be believed, the very

¹ For a discussion of this most intricate question, see Wicksteed's note in Appendix to Witte's *Essays on Dante*, 434-438. Dr Moore is inclined to accept Boccaccio's story that the poem was interrupted by political troubles at the end of Canto vii, its resumption long after being marked by the opening words of Canto viii, 'I say, continuing'. On this assumption, he thinks Dante may have begun the *Inferno* on one moral plan and finished it on another. 'It does not seem to me impossible to suppose that Dante may have actually begun the *Inferno* with an idea of following the classification of the Seven Deadly Sins, but, finding it after a certain point unsuitable, he may have adopted a different method, and then have invented the *ex post facto* explanation of Canto xi as an ingenious way of covering the change of plan and giving a factitious appearance of unity of design to the composite work' (*Studies in Dante*, second series, 188).

² *Inf* xi 94-96

servant-maids lent out their wages. Writing in the first half of the thirteenth century, Matthew Paris says 'In these days prevailed the horrible nuisance of the Caursines to such a degree that there was hardly any one in all England, especially among the bishops, who was not caught in their net Even the King was held indebted to them in an incalculable sum of money. For they circumvented the needy in their necessities, cloaking their usury under the show of trade, and pretending not to know that whatsoever is added to the principal is usury, under whatever name it may be called' In short, Caorsine was a synonym for usurer ¹

CANTO XI
—

Now, the strange thing is that Sodom and Cahors are put together in the same Circle, the reason being that both are regarded as sinners against Nature This is obvious in the case of Sodom, which represents unnatural sensuality, but how comes it that Usury is also a sin against Nature? Virgil answers this question partly from Aristotle and partly from Scripture, almost equal authorities in Dante's mind In his *Physics* (ii 2) Aristotle says, 'Art imitates Nature' But Nature is the child of God, offspring of the Divine Intellect, and Art—that is, any work or craft of man—which imitates Nature, may therefore be called the child of Nature and, as it were, the grandchild of God According to the Book of Genesis, from these two, Nature and Art, 'mankind

Why is Usury
a Sin against
Nature?

¹ Comp *Par* xxvii 58, 59

'Of our blood Caorsines and Gascons
Prepare themselves to drink'

The reference is to Clement v, a Gascon, and John xxii, a native of Cahors

CANTO XI gain their life and advance.'¹ In other words, man must get his livelihood from Nature. 'The Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it', and he must get it by means of Art or work 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread' But the usurer 'takes another way,' and 'elsewhere puts his hope' That is to say, he evades the Divine law of work laid down for man at the beginning Disdaining work or Art, he disdains Nature of which it is the imitator, disdaining Nature, he disdains God whose child she is Hence it is that Blasphemers, Sodom, and Cahors are all placed in the same Circle Blasphemers do direct violence to God, defying Himself, Sodomites do violence to Nature, which is the child of God, and Caorsines or Usurers to Art, which is, so to speak, His grandchild And of the three Dante regards the last as the worst, for, as we shall see, he sets the Usurers on the very edge of the precipice which overhangs the next Circle, as if morally they almost belonged to it

Mediæval
View of Usury

Into the question of the Ethics of Usury, recently revived by Ruskin, there is no need to enter further than is necessary to show how it looked to the mediæval mind We apply the word Usury now to the taking of *exorbitant* interest, but the original idea was undoubtedly the taking of *any* The ground for this was Scriptural, in *Leviticus* it is written 'If thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee, then thou shalt relieve him yea, though

¹ It is somewhat strange to find Virgil quoting Scripture Probably the reason is that the passage refers to a truth which lies within the knowledge of the natural man

he be a stranger, or a sojourner, that he may live with thee. Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase.' This prohibition is repeated in *Deuteronomy*, where, however, the taking of usury from strangers is expressly allowed.¹ The wisest of the heathen take the same view Plato in his *Laws* says 'No one shall lend money upon interest, and the borrower shall be under no obligation to repay either capital or interest', and in the *Republic* he describes usurers in these scornful words. 'The men of business, stooping as they walk, and pretending not even to see those whom they have already ruined, insert the sting—that is, their money—into some one else who is not on his guard against them, and recover the parent sum many times multiplied into a family of children and so they make drone and pauper to abound in the State.'² This reference to 'the parent sum multiplied into a family of children,' recalls Aristotle's view which was undoubtedly in Dante's mind when he declares that Usury is—at least indirectly—a violation of Nature. Aristotle argues from the Greek name for Usury, *τόκος*, which means *offspring*. The very name is its condemnation, for it implies that money breeds money; and money being in itself a barren thing, he argues that to cause it to produce 'offspring' is a violation of Nature. In his *Politics* he writes 'Of all bad forms of Finance there is none which so

¹ *Lev* xxv 35-37, *Deut* xxiii 19, 20

² Plato—*Laws*, v 742, *Rep* viii 555

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CANTO XI — well deserves abhorrence as petty usury, because in it it is money itself which produces the gain instead of serving the purpose for which it was devised. For it was invented simply as a medium of exchange, whereas interest multiplies the money itself. Indeed it is to this fact it owes its name (*τόκος* or *offspring*), as children bear a likeness to their parents, and interest is money born of money. It may be concluded, therefore, that no form of money-making does so much violence to Nature as this.¹ From this passage, the barrenness of money became proverbial in the Middle Ages, and of course Dante was perfectly familiar with it. The Church passed severe laws against the taking of interest: a cleric was suspended, a layman excommunicated.

The change in economic conditions which has come over the world has compelled the Church to take up a different attitude to this question, allowing the taking of interest for ordinary commercial purposes, and confining the name of usury to the exaction of excessive and extortionate interest. In justice to the Church, it can scarcely be held with fairness that this change involves any real inconsistency, or proves that her mediæval attitude was an error. In those days, and under the conditions of life then prevailing, there was very little lending of money for commercial purposes. The borrower as a rule was not a solvent man who sought money to extend a prosperous business and increase his profits: he was usually a man in need, who asked a

¹ *Politics*, i. 10. Comp. *The Merchant of Venice*, Act I. Scene 3.

‘For when did friendship take
A breed for barren metal of his friend?’

loan to stave off impending ruin, and whose very necessity placed him at the mercy of unscrupulous lenders. Even if the Church overshot the mark somewhat in declaring *all* interest sinful, it was an error which leant to virtue's side in face of the conditions of the age, the notorious cruelties of money-lenders, and the widespread poverty and ruin which followed their operations. On the whole we shall not be greatly in error if we accept the conclusion of a Roman Catholic political economist of our time. 'In reality the essential wrongfulness of making profit without labour, risk, or responsibility from the property of others, of claiming an increase from what is essentially barren, of turning the simplicity or distress of others to one's own gain, has been maintained by the Church from her foundation to this day, and the resort of usurers, whether in the Temple of Jerusalem, the drinking shops of Poland, or the loan offices of England, she has ever looked on as a den of thieves. Usury is just as unlawful now as in the middle ages, but many transactions bearing the same name or appearance, which were usurious then, are now innocent, the Church rightly forbade them then, and as rightly permits them now'¹

¹ Devas' *Political Economy*, p 328 For an interesting discussion of Usury from the standpoint of the R C Church, see Father Rickaby's *Moral Philosophy*, pp 255 263

CHAPTER XII

CIRCLE VII —THE VIOLENT AGAINST NEIGHBOURS

CANTO XII THE pilgrims now begin the descent to the Circle of
— Violence The time is indicated in Dante's usual
astronomic fashion

'The Fishes are quivering on the horizon,
And all the Wain lies over Caurus'¹—

The Great
Landslip to
Nether Hell.

that is, Caurus being the North-west wind, the Wain
or Great Bear is right upon the North-west line.
The hour is between four and five on the Saturday
morning As we saw, the path downward is the
wild and broken precipice in the middle of that
central valley to which the City of Dis slopes, cup-
like, on every side Dante compares it to a great
landslip, known as the Slavini di Marco, on the left
bank of the Adige between Verona and Trent, caused,
he says, by an earthquake or some 'defective prop.'
Virgil informs him that when he passed this way on
his former journey through Hell, this cliff stood un-
broken, and that its fall had been caused by the
earthquake which took place at the time of the
Crucifixion, when, he says,

Earthquake of
the Cruci-
fixion

'Upon all sides the deep and loathsome valley
Trembled so, that I thought the universe
Was thrilled with love, by which there are who think
The world oft-times converted into chaos'²

¹ *Inf* xi. 113, 114

² *Inf* xii 40-43

This great landslip is, of course, symbolic. Its depth signifies the vastness of the fall from upper to nether Hell—from mere lack of self-control which injures ourselves to sins of malice which strike at Society. Its moral significance is much the same as that of the sickening stench which issues from the pit, both indicate that we have reached a deeper and more hateful quality of evil. Further, the landslip is expressly associated with the Crucifixion: it took place when 'the universe was thrilled with love.' Ruskin connects this with 'the infamy of Crete,' which lies stretched on the top of the ruined pathway. 'This Minotaur,' he says, 'is the type or embodiment of the two essentially bestial sins of Anger and Lust,' and 'both these are, in the human nature, interwoven inextricably with its chief virtue, Love, so that Dante makes this very ruin of the Rocks of hell, on which the Minotaur is couched, to be wrought on them at the instant when "the Universe was thrilled with love,"—the last moment of the Crucifixion'¹ It may be doubted if this was in Dante's mind. What he really wished to emphasize was that the sins beneath—Violence, Fraud, and Treachery—are sins against Love, sins which break 'the knot and fellowship of mankind' They are, indeed, the very sins which crucified Christ. He died a violent death, and Violence is punished in the Circle to which this landslip leads down. In the Circle below that again, the same earthquake, as we shall see, has broken the bridge over the Moat in which lie Caiaphas and the Councillors who crucified

¹ *Fors Clavigera*, Letter XXIII p. 23

CANTO XII *their Lord, now themselves crucified. Judas, who betrayed Him into their hands, is in the lowest Circle, writhing in the central mouth of Lucifer. It is in this way that Dante indicates the connection of this nether Hell with that central tragedy and sin of all the universe which took place on Calvary. Nature herself trembled at the threefold crime against Love in its Divinest form. One cannot help suspecting also that Dante means to give a hint of the final and utter hopelessness of such sins. Take, for instance, the allusion to those 'who think the world oft-times converted unto chaos'. The reference is to the philosophy of Empedocles. In his poem, *On Nature*, Empedocles lays down 'as the material principles or "roots" of things, the four elements, earth, water, air, and fire, to which he joins as moving forces two ideal principles: love as a uniting, and hate as a separating force. The periods of the formation of the world depend on the alternate prevalence of love and hate. During certain periods all heterogeneous elements are separated from each other by hate, during others, they are everywhere united by love'. While the process is in operation, even love dissolves the world into a chaos, with a view, of course, to ultimate unity. But in Hell there can be no ultimate unity of love. The shock of it is felt here from the Cross itself, but it can only throw this world of hate and chaos into greater chaos: the very love of Christ can but break the pathway into irrevocable ruin. It is entirely in the temper of Dante's mind thus to find the fulfilment of the speculation of a heathen philosopher in the facts and doctrines of the Christian faith.*

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The two travellers find their passage barred by the Guardian of the Circle, the Minotaur of mythology .

CANTO XII

On the border of the broken chasm
The infamy of Crete was stretched along
Who was conceived in the fictitious cow ¹

Guardian of
the Pass
the Minotaur
of Crete

The myth is well known. Dante sets him here as the symbol of brute violence and unnatural lust, sins punished in the Circle of which he is the Guardian. As the monster of the Labyrinth of Crete devouring his yearly tribute of Athenian youths and maidens, he is the type of Violence, and as himself the fruit of an unnatural passion, he is fit Guardian of a Circle in which sins against Nature receive their reward. Indeed, when we see how many of the guardians of this Circle are forms half brute, half human, it is difficult to resist the conviction that Dante, as suggested in last Chapter, means it to correspond to the Bestiality of Aristotle's *Ethics*. The sins of Violence against God and Nature, our neighbours, and ourselves, are so bestial that they half transform men into brutes and monsters. The quality and degree of the transformation vary in the different sins. According to Ruskin's discrimination, 'the Minotaur has a man's body, a bull's head, (which is precisely the general type of the English nation to-day). The Centaur Chiron has a horse's body, a man's head and breast. The Spirit of Fraud, Geryon, has a serpent's body, his face is that of a just man, and his breast chequered like a lizard's, with labyrinthine lines. All these three creatures signify the mingling of a brutal instinct

Symbol of
Violence and
Unnatural
Lust

¹ *Inf* XII 11-13

CANTO XII with the human mind, but, in the Minotaur, the brute rules, the humanity is subordinate; in the Centaur, the man rules, and the brute is subordinate, in the third, the man and the animal are in harmony, and both false.'

The Labyrinth
of Crete.

Ruskin further suggests what seems to have occurred to few commentators, that the Circles underneath are the true Cretan Labyrinth. One can scarcely fail to be struck with the number of references to Crete in this part of the *Inferno*. Once 'glad with waters and with leaves,' it is now 'a wasted land'—wasted with the sins to which Dante is about to descend. Its Golden Age is long past. Inside Ida, the mountain chosen by Rhea as the cradle of her son Jupiter, stands a great Old Man of gold, silver, iron, and clay, the image of Time, and through his broken form there flow down into Hell the tears of the human race which form the infernal rivers, Acheron, Styx, and Phlegethon, the last being the River of Blood which drains this Circle of the Violent. It would certainly complete this Cretan scenery if we had the famous Labyrinth, indeed, the Minotaur almost demands it. For my own part, I have no doubt Dante had it clearly before his mind when he constructed this nether Hell Circle within Circle of unnatural passion in which the human loses itself in the brute, and convolution within convolution of Fraud through whose endless maze of duplicity even Virgil, for all his clue of Reason, at times can scarcely find his way.¹

On seeing the two travellers approach, the Mino-

¹ *Fors*, Letters xxiii, xxiv

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taur bit himself in his blind brute-like fury, and CANTO XII
 Virgil struck him helpless with very excess of passion by telling him that his companion is not
Descent of the Pilgrims.
 'the Duke of Athens,'—as he calls Theseus, who had slain him in the Cretan Labyrinth—but one who came to see the punishments On hearing this taunt, it was as if the monster felt once more the stroke that slew him 'in the world above' he plunged hither and thither like a bull that has received its death-blow Taking advantage of this paroxysm of passion, Virgil cried to Dante,

'Run to the passage,
 While he is in fury, it is good that thou descend'

Virgil knows that with such brute-like passions it is both vain and dangerous to reason the only prudent thing is to run. We shall see how in the Circle beneath this, when pursued by the demons of the Moat of Pitch, he caught Dante up in his arms and fled with him to a place of safety beyond their reach, there is a malice so diabolical that it would be certain destruction to stay and reason with it.

Rushing down the steep pass, the stones of which, Dante notices, move under the unwonted weight of living feet, they find themselves in the Circle of the Violent It consists of three concentric Rings, corresponding to the three classes of sinners here punished The outermost Ring is a River of Blood, 'in which boils every one who by violence injures others' The second Ring is a Belt of Wood, the trees of which are the souls of Suicides, the Violent against Themselves And the central Ring is a Plain of Sand, on whose naked surface the Violent against

The Circle of
 Violence
 First Ring.

CANTO XII God, Nature, and Art bear a constant rain of flakes of fire.

Phlegethon,
the River of
Blood, and the
Centaur

From the pathway of the great landslip, Virgil points out to Dante the River of Blood which, like a bended bow, stretched beneath them as far as the eye could see on either hand. Its banks were patrolled incessantly by Centaurs, running in single file, and armed with bows and arrows. Dante names three of them famous in heathen mythology, Chiron and his two lieutenants, Nessus and Pholus. Like the Minotaur, they are half man, half brute, but, unlike him, the brute is undermost—the head is human, the body that of a horse. In general, the Centaurs are symbols of the lawless and inhuman Violence which is here punished, Benvenuto, for example, well compares them to the mercenaries under the ‘condottieri,’ who were then beginning to play so brutal a part in Italian wars. It is obvious that the three singled out by Dante are intended to represent three aspects of this Violence, although it is not easy to distinguish them. Plumptre, after pointing out that Chiron was the teacher of Achilles in hunting, medicine, gymnastics, and music, says that ‘in each of the three, Dante, we may believe, saw the type of the various degrees of deepening evil which come when the brute nature mars the completeness of the human life, beginning with half-genial animation, and passing on into sheer ferocity’; and he notes that Dante’s friend, Giotto, in his fresco at Assisi of St Francis taking the vow of obedience, introduces a Centaur, evidently as a symbol of lawlessness. Another writer sees in

the three Centaurs symbols of the three forms of Violence punished in the three concentric Rings of this Circle. 'Nessus, who died by the hand of Hercules for his attempted outrage upon Deianeira, personates violence against one's neighbour, Chiron, who injured himself nearly to death from dropping one of the arrows of Hercules on his foot, figures violence against oneself, Pholus, who is said to have been a blasphemer against the gods, symbolizes violence against God' The objection to this view—not to speak of making the accident to Chiron a case of self-violence—is that if Dante had meant them thus to represent the three forms of Violence in this Circle, he would have set one in each of the three Rings as its special guardian, whereas they are all confined to the bank of the River of Blood. Nessus, for example, though he can carry Dante over the ford to the Wood of the Suicides, is forced to return at once to his own side of the River. We come much nearer Dante's meaning if we follow his own hints in Virgil's description of the three. They are intended to represent three of the great sources of Violence against our neighbours. Nessus stands for Lust and Revenge, as the references to Deianeira and Hercules show, Pholus, 'who was so full of anger,' for mere brute fury, while Chiron, who is between the other two as their chief, represents a far higher order of violence. His head is bent upon his breast in thought, and he is the teacher of great heroes like Achilles. The suggestion has been made that he stands for Ambition, and doubtless Ambition mingled with his violence. But rather he represents that

CANTO XII
—

CANTO XII type of violent man in whom great powers of mind are mingled with a brute-like force and become its slaves. Among the souls in the River of Blood, Chiron is probably represented by Alexander the Great; Pholus by the brute fury of Azzolino and Obizzo da Est¹, and Nessus by the wild revenge of Guy de Montfort. The function of the whole troop of Centaurs is to patrol the banks and keep the souls of the Violent against their Neighbours immersed in the River of Blood to the due depth—for each is sunk according to the kind and measure of his violence

‘Thousands and thousands go about the moat
Shooting with shafts whatever soul uproots himself
Out of the blood, more than his crime allots’¹

Chiron

Like the Guardians of the other Circles, the Centaurs oppose the entrance of the strangers. Nessus challenges them while they are still descending the broken precipice, and is answered by Virgil that they will give their reply to Chiron himself. When they draw near, Chiron takes an arrow and with the notch puts back his great mane-like beard from his mouth—a gesture so peculiar that it probably has some symbolic significance, although it seems to be unknown. Perhaps it is nothing more than a gesture of hesitation, for he sees something to make him pause. This is no dead lost soul that is descending—the stones move beneath his feet

After he had uncovered his great mouth,
He said to his companions ‘Are you ware
That he behind moveth whate’er he touches?
Thus are not wont to do the feet of the dead’²

¹ *Inf* xii 73 75

² *Inf* xii 79 82

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'He moves whate'er he touches' whether meant CANTO XII
 or not, nothing could more pregnantly describe the
 poet's own genius Virgil, who had now reached
 the great Centaur and stood at his breast where the
 two natures met, explains to him that their journey
 is not one of pleasure but of necessity, and requests
 him to send one of his troop to point out the ford of
 the river and carry Dante across,—'for 'tis no spirit
 that can walk the air' Chiron thereupon orders
 Nessus to act as their guide. This Centaur is chosen Nessus as
Guide
 for this service because in the myth he carried
 travellers across the river Evenus, and Dante here
 calls him ironically 'the faithful escort,' in allusion
 to his attempted outrage on Deianeira when she was
 committed to his care As they walk along the
 river-bank, Nessus points out and names the souls
 immersed in the boiling blood at varying depth,
 according to the measure of their violence against
 their fellows—to the eyebrows, the throat, the chest,
 and so on down to the ankles The River grows
 shallower and shallower as it approaches the ford,
 on the other side of which it gradually deepens
 again In its deepest part are plunged to the eye-
 brows the great tyrants of history—Alexander, Tyrants
 Dionysius of Syracuse, Attila,¹ Pyrrhus, and the
 like The Alexander here is probably the Great,
 although many modern commentators take it to be
 the Thessalian tyrant, Alexander of Pheræ, on the
 ground that in other parts of his writings Dante

¹ It is thought by some that Dante confuses Attila, King of the
 Huns, with Totila, King of the Ostrogoths To the latter Villani
 (ii 1) attributes the sack of Florence, while Dante refers it to Attila
 (*Inf* xlii 149)

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CANTO XII praises Alexander the Great. 'who,' he asks in the *Convito*, 'has not Alexander still in his heart because of his royal beneficence?'¹ After such praise it is held that it would be a great inconsistency on Dante's part to place him in Hell. But, as Toynbee points out, it is precisely this kind of 'inconsistency' of which Dante is frequently guilty. The Saladin, Julius Cæsar, Guido da Montefeltro, Bertran de Born, Frederick II, all are eulogized for this quality or that, yet none the less all are inexorably consigned to perdition. As Toynbee says, 'to praise a man for his munificence surely need not imply a condonation of his crimes or shortcomings.' Dante probably took his view from Orosius, who describes Alexander as 'that great whirlpool of miseries, and most savage whirlwind of the entire Orient,' who 'for twelve years crushed the trembling earth beneath him with the sword,' and at last died at Babylon 'still thirsting for blood.' Now at length his thirst must surely be satisfied, plunged to the eyebrows in a river of it. Along with him and Dionysius, tyrants of old time, Dante names two of his own century

'That forehead there which has the hair so black
Is Azzolino,'—

commonly known as Ezzelino III of Romano in

¹ *Conv* iv 11. In *De Mon* ii 9 Dante says that of all the men who strove for that universal Empire which only Rome won, Alexander came nearest to the prize. His failure was a direct interposition of God. "'Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" Who will not marvel at thee here? For when Alexander was trying to hinder his Roman competitor in the race, thou didst suddenly snatch him away from the contest that his rashness might proceed no further.'

Venetia. His sister Cunizza in the Heaven of Venus CANTO XII
 calls him a firebrand which destroyed the Trevisan March. Certainly, if but half the story of his atrocities is true, few men can have deserved more thoroughly the doom Dante assigns him. According to Villani, who wrote while Ezzelino's career was still fresh in men's memories, he was 'the most cruel and redoubtable tyrant that ever was among Christians, and ruled by his force and tyranny for a long time the Trevisan March and the city of Padua, and a great part of Lombardy, and he brought to an end a very great part of the citizens of Padua, and blinded great numbers of the best and most noble, taking their possessions, and sending them begging through the world, and many others he put to death by divers sufferings and torments, and burnt at one time 11,000 Paduans, and by reason of their innocent blood, by miracle, no grass grew there again for evermore. And under semblance of a rugged and cruel justice he did much evil, and was a great scourge in his time in the Trevisan-March and in Lombardy'.¹ 'In 1255,' says Toynbee, 'Pope Alexander IV proclaimed a crusade against Ezzelino, styling him "a son of perdition, a man of blood, the most inhuman of the children of men, who, by his infamous torture of the nobles and massacre of the people, has broken every bond of human society, and violated every law of Christian liberty"'. It is disputed how far Ezzelino's companion, the fair-haired Obizzo da Esti, Marquis of Ferrara, merited the same punishment, but Dante, at all events, saw little to

¹ *Villani*, vi 72

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CANTO XII choose between the two In 1293 he died, the belief
 ————— of the time being that he was smothered by his son,
 Azzo VIII, who succeeded him Dante here calls him
 his 'stepson,' either to indicate the unnatural char-
 acter of the crime, or, as some think, to suggest the
 unfaithfulness of his mother

Murderers
Guy de
Montfort.

Of the murderers immersed to the neck only one
 is named, a soul apart from the rest, probably on
 account of the heinousness of his crime

‘ He cleft asunder in God’s bosom
 The heart that still upon the Thames is honoured ’¹

It is Guy de Montfort, son of the famous Earl of Leicester who was slain at the battle of Evesham in 1265 ‘The bosom of God’ is the Church of S Silvestro in Viterbo, where in 1271, in revenge for his father’s death, he stabbed to the heart his cousin Henry, son of the Earl of Cornwall, while he was in the act of receiving the Host Villani narrates an incident which shows how determined and pitiless was his vengeance ‘The said Count Guy, being provided with a company of men-at-arms on horse and on foot, was not content only with having done the said murder, forasmuch as a cavalier asked him what he had done, and he replied, “I have taken my revenge,” and that cavalier said, “How? Your father was trailed”, and immediately he returned to the church, and took Henry by the hair, and dead as he was, he dragged him vilely without the church.’ Villani adds that Edward, the brother of the mur-

¹ *Inf* XII 119, 120

dered Prince, leaving Viterbo in great indignation CANTO XII
 that no attempt was made to avenge the crime,
 'came into England, and set the heart of his said
 brother in a golden cup upon a pillar at the head of
 London Bridge over the river Thames, to keep the
 English in mind of the outrage sustained', and it is
 probably to this that Dante refers when he speaks
 of 'the heart which still upon the Thames is hon-
 oured'¹ In reality, it seems that Henry's body was
 taken to England and buried in the Cistercian
 Abbey of Hayles in Gloucestershire, but there was
 a story current in Italy that the heart was extracted,
 and the casket containing it set by his cousin King
 Edward in the hand of a statue of the prince, erected
 on London Bridge or in Westminster Abbey. Con-
 cerning the punishment assigned to the murderer, it
 is at first sight a little surprising to find that so
 heinous a crime, committed at the very altar, sinks
 the soul less deeply in the River than tyranny does.
 The reason, however, is plain enough. It was one
 single sin of violence, and not a lifetime of it, like
 Ezzelino's career. Further, it had the excuse, such as
 it was, of the vendetta: it sprang from the natural
 passion of a son revenging his father's death. Not
 that Dante favoured the vendetta, in the next Circle
 we shall see his own kinsman, Geri del Bello, shaking
 his finger at him because he had left his death
 unavenged.² Nevertheless, while condemning the
 vendetta, Dante understood 'the wild justice of
 revenge,' and made some allowance for it. On the

¹ *Villani*, vii. 39. Villani evidently means his cousin, Edward I.

² *Inf.* xxix. 25-27. See pp. 396-398.

CANTO XII — other hand, if not sunk so deeply in the river, de Montfort's punishment is increased in another way—he is set apart by himself. It is possible, as some think, that this is because he was an Englishman, a native of a distant land which lay outside of the Empire,¹ but it is more probable that it was because of the peculiar heinousness of the crime. It was committed 'in the bosom of God,' and this means more than simply in a church. It was when the Host, the Holy Body of Christ, was being elevated, that the murderous blow was struck, and a sinner guilty of such unspeakable sacrilege, must remain apart in the solitude of a guilt which could scarcely be paralleled. Of the shades immersed to the chest, Dante says he recognized many, as indeed he well might, considering the almost universal violence in the midst of which he lived.

Highwaymen

Punishment.

Turning now to the punishment, it is obvious that, in outward form, it is simply the recoil of their own crimes upon these murderers. Having shed human blood in streams upon the earth, they are now plunged in a river of it throughout eternity. And, indeed, there is a fierce instinct of justice in us which rejoices in so appropriate a retribution. It would be a strange and incredible flaw in a universe ruled by a righteous God, which would allow a monster of cruelty like Ezzelino to escape finally and for ever. Although Dante condemns it as the evil pride of victory, we cannot help sympathizing

¹ As the Saladin sat apart from the other heroes in Limbo, as belonging to another race and faith (*Inf.* iv 129)

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somewhat with that Queen Tomyris of whom CANTO XII
he tells us, that when she had slain Cyrus in —
battle, she threw his head into a vessel of blood,
crying,

‘Blood thou didst thirst for, and with blood I glut thee!’¹

Nevertheless it is not this literal and material retribution of blood for blood that Dante has chiefly in view. It is, as in all his punishments, the *moral* recoil of Violence of which he is thinking. This River consists indeed of the blood shed by murderers, flowing down, as Virgil tells us, through the cloven body of Time, but it is also, in a figure, the hot-blooded passions which swept these men on during a lifetime of outrage. In that other world those violent passions have become their eternal element, from which they cannot ‘uproot themselves,’ to use Dante’s phrase. The Centaurs that patrol the banks and shoot them down to their proper level, are simply their own wild lawless habits which they have made tyrants over themselves, and from whose vigilance escape is impossible. Still further, hot-blooded as these violent passions were on earth, they are hotter now. Dante tells us that the River of Blood is boiling, that the souls are ‘cooked’ in it, and that Divine Justice ‘to eternity milks the tears’ from them, ‘which by the boiling it unlocks.’ What Dante means is probably this, that passions of hot blood which are allowed on earth to break out in violence against others, intensify in a world where

¹ *Purg* xii. 55-57

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CANTO XII no opportunity of their breaking out is possible.

— Finding no outlet in deeds of violence the thwarted
passions grow into an agony,—a boiling River of
Blood, which wrings the tears even from these
monsters of cruelty

CHAPTER XIII

CIRCLE VII —THE VIOLENT AGAINST THEMSELVES

WE now enter the second Ring of the Seventh Circle, CANTO XIII
in which the Violent against Themselves receive Circle of
Violence
Second Ring
their punishment Before Nessus, who carried
Dante across the Ford of the River of Blood, had
time to regain the other side, the pilgrims found
themselves within a pathless wood, a wilder jungle The Wood of
Suicides.
than the brakes of the Maremma, the haunt in
Dante's day of wild beasts no orchard, he says, fair
with apples, but a wilderness of dusky leaves, boughs
gnarled and twisted, and poisonous thorns It is a
picture of what the world would become if the natural
instinct of self-preservation were universally vio-
lated, a barren wilderness, pathless, gloomy, tangled
and poisonous in strong and intentional contrast
to that other wood on the top of Mount Purgatory,
where the purified soul is free to wander at its will
through the living sunlit green, all musical with
songs of birds In this weird forest no birds sing.
only the fabled Harpies utter their sad lamenting The Harpies
cries among the branches Like the Minotaur and
Centaurs, they are a hideous mingling of the human
and the brutish

Wide wings have they, and necks and faces human,
Feet with claws, and the great belly feathered ¹

¹ *Inf* xiii 13, 14

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CANTO XIII At first Dante imagines that the lamentations which
assail his ears come from people who have hidden
themselves in the thicket, for fear of the newcomers;
and Virgil, to show him his error, asks him to break
off a twig from any of the trees. Approaching,
therefore, a 'great thorn,' Dante did as his Guide
had directed, whereupon the trunk bled as from a
wound, and through the oozing blood issued an
indignant cry

The 'Great
Thorn'

'Why dost thou rend me?
Hast thou no spirit of pity whatsoever?
Men we were, and now are changed to trees,
In truth, thy hand should be more pitiful,
Even if the souls of serpents we had been'¹

Virgil soothes the 'wounded soul' by explaining
that he had to take this method of teaching his
companion, because he had not believed what he had
read in his verses. The reference is to the Third
Book of the *Æneid*, in which Virgil tells how Æneas
in Thrace, attempting to break off the branches of a
tree, was reproached for his cruelty by Polydorus,
son of Priam of Troy, who was imprisoned within
it.² To make amends to the 'great thorn,' Virgil
promises that if he relate the story of his life, Dante
will 'refresh his fame' in the upper world, to which
he has power to return.

The Hunt of
the Spend
thriffs

No sooner had this soul told the story of his life
and doom, than they were startled by a sudden
crashing of branches, as if a boar-hunt were sweep-
ing through the forest towards them, and imme-
diately, on their left, two naked souls came tearing

¹ *Inf* xiii 35-39

² *Æn* iii 22-46

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through the tangled thorns, while behind them the wood was full of 'black she-mastiffs,' ravenous, and swift as greyhounds newly shipped. One of the hunted wretches managed to escape for the time; but the other, finding his breath failing, crouched down under the shelter of a bush, and was immediately torn limb from limb by the black mastiffs. In the wild struggle, the bush under which he had taken refuge had its leaves and branches torn and scattered, and Dante at its entreaty, hearing that it was a Florentine soul, for the love of his native city piously gathered together and restored to it its bleeding leaves

In this weird narrative it is evident that Dante wishes to distinguish various types of suicide, for obviously suicide must differ in moral quality, according to its motive and cause. The noblest type of suicide in the *Commedia* is Cato, whom Dante rescues from Hell and makes the Guardian of Mount Purgatory, because he laid violent hands on himself for the sacred cause of liberty as he says in the *De Monarchia*, 'to inflame the world with a love of freedom, Cato preferred dying free to living a slave.'¹ Next Cato, though at a long distance, comes the 'great thorn' from which Dante plucked the twig. It is the soul of an upright and honourable man, driven to the desperate deed by envy, slander, and persecution. It is perhaps to indicate the nobility of his nature, or possibly the high rank which he once held on earth, that he is represented as a 'great thorn,' in contrast to many of the other souls who

¹ *De Mon* 11 5, *Conv* 14 5, *Purg* 1 71 76

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CANTO XIII are only low-growing shrubs, like that under which the fugitive flung himself for refuge from the dogs. This nobler spirit is Pier delle Vigne, whose master, Frederick II., we have already seen in the burning tomb of the Epicureans. He is said to have been the son of a vine-dresser of Capua, and it is possible that it is to this humble origin he owes his name. Educated probably at Bologna, he rose rapidly until he became the Chancellor and most trusted adviser of Frederick II.,—in his own words

‘I am he who both keys had in keeping
Of Frederick’s heart, and turned them to and fro
So softly in locking and unlocking,
That from his secrets almost all men I shut out’¹

The two keys are probably the favour and disfavour of the Emperor, his mercy and his judgment, but it is possible there is also some allusion to the keys of Peter. According to Oelsner, ‘when he was at the height of his power, Pier was often compared to his namesake, the Apostle Peter,’ just as his master, according to some historians, was regarded as Messiah. Doubtless it was the very greatness of his power with the Emperor which led to his sudden downfall, by the envy and hatred which it created. This, at least, is his own account of it, which Dante certainly accepted

‘The courtesan who never from the dwelling
Of Cæsar turned aside her harlot eyes,
Death universal and the vice of courts,
Inflamed against me all the other minds,
And they, inflamed, did so inflame Augustus,
That my glad honours turned to dismal mournings’²

¹ *Inf.* xiii 58-61

² *Inf.* xiii 64-69

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The accounts of his downfall and death are very conflicting and obscure. According to one report, he betrayed his master's secrets to his enemy, the Pope, according to another, he was suspected of engaging in a conspiracy to poison the Emperor. Whatever the cause, Frederick entirely lost his confidence in him, and the man who put his own son to death on suspicion of rebellion was little likely to spare his Chancellor.¹ What exactly happened is doubtful, but according to one account Frederick caused his eyes to be burnt out, and then led him about from place to place as a public example, 'the master-councillor of the Emperor, who was lord of his law and betrayed him to the Pope' In 1249 in Pisa the unhappy man is said to have ended his earthly misery by dashing out his brains against the walls of his prison. Here he protests solemnly, 'by the new roots of this tree,' that he was innocent of the charge of treachery, and the great reverence with which he still speaks of the Emperor is the best proof of the truth of his words. Not a syllable of anger or revenge escapes his lips, the whole blame is laid on the envious courtiers who abused his master's mind. In spite of the cruelty which drove a faithful servant to suicide and perdition, Frederick is still 'my lord, who was so worthy of honour' There is something very touching and noble in this loyalty which Hell itself cannot undermine. It shows how complete was Dante's faith in his innocence indeed, had he not

¹ Villani (vi 22) says Frederick starved his son Henry to death because he remonstrated with him for his war against the Church. According to Villani, Piero delle Vigne died of grief in prison after his eyes were put out.

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CANTO XIII believed in it, he must have placed him in the lowest Hell among Traitors to their Lords and Benefactors. We can well believe that Dante had the keenest personal sympathy with this unfortunate soul, more sinned against than sinning. He himself had been the victim of envy and slander, and it was but natural that he should seek to rescue 'from the blow that envy dealt it,' the memory of one whose fortune was not all unlike his own. Nevertheless, though he is firmly convinced of his faithfulness to his master, and though pity chokes his voice so that he has to ask Virgil to continue the conversation, he has no doubt whatever that this weird wild Wood of the Suicides is his inevitable place. He had learned from Aquinas that while suicide is primarily a sin against a man's self, it is also a sin against the community of which he is a part, and against God from whose hand he received the gift of life. Further Aquinas, following Aristotle, had taught him that no possible misery of the present life can justify a man in plunging into death, 'because the extremest and most terrible of the evils of this life is death, as appears from the Philosopher, and therefore to compass one's own death in order to avoid the other miseries of this life, is to take the greater evil to escape the less'¹

The Suicide
of Florence

The Florentine whose soul was the bush torn in the struggle of the dogs, is a much baser type of suicide, the special baseness being indicated in the line

'Of my own house I made myself a gibbet'

¹ *Summa*, li ii, q. lxxiv a. 5.

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The gibbet is universally regarded as a place of infamy; and for a man to have so little respect for his own house, his family name and traditions, as to turn it into a gibbet, is to a proud Florentine like Dante, who gloried even in Paradise in the nobility of his blood, a proof of no ordinary baseness. It is perhaps to symbolize this that the suicide is turned into a mere shrub. Several conjectures as to his identity have been made. Lotto degli Agli, a Florentine judge, who, after delivering an unjust judgment for a bribe, went home and hanged himself, or Rocco de' Mozzi, a Florentine who committed suicide because he fell from great wealth to poverty. The probability is that Dante left the name unrevealed because he had not one but many in view. If commentators are to be believed, the particular form of suicide affected by the Florentines in Dante's day was hanging, just as in our time it is said to be throwing themselves out of the window.¹ If so, Dante may purposely have left this soul unnamed, that his words might be a warning to the city in general.

And, indeed, Dante uses this Florentine to give a warning to the city in general in another sense. The suicide thus describes himself

The Suicide of
Communities

'I of that city was which for the Baptist
Changed its first patron, wherefore he for this
For ever with his art will make it sad
And were it not that on the pass of Arno
Some semblance of him is remaining still,
Those citizens who afterwards rebuilt it
Upon the ashes left by Attila,
In vain had caused their labour to be done.'²

¹ Vernon's *Readings on the Inferno*, i 448 n.

² *Inf.* xiii 143 150

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CANTO XIII This is a passage which has given great trouble to the commentators. It refers to the tradition given by Villani as current in his time concerning the way in which Florence changed its patron. In its pagan days its tutelary god was Mars, but when it became Christian it put itself under the protection of the Baptist. Finding it written, however, in their ancient records that if the statue of Mars were broken or despised, great calamities would befall the city, the Florentines set it in a high tower beside the Arno. When Attila—a mistake perhaps for Totila—destroyed the city, as he is said to have done, the statue of Mars fell into the Arno, where it remained until the city was rebuilt in 801, according to another myth, by Charles the Great. Villani says it was the opinion of the ancients that if the statue was not found, it would be impossible to rebuild the city, and it is to this belief Dante refers in the closing lines of the above quotation. A fragment of the image was drawn from the Arno and set at the head of the Ponte Vecchio.¹ This is the tradition, and the difficulty is to discover Dante's reason for introducing it here. It is absurd to suppose that he believed the mere stone, a fragment of a heathen god, had such power for weal or woe over his native city, even Villani laughs at it as a pagan superstition. Benvenuto gives an ingenious explanation which may have some truth in it. 'Dante is uttering against the Florentines a taunt, which, though veiled, is exceedingly bitter, namely, that from the time that Florence dismissed Mars, that is, strength

¹ *Villani*, iii 1

and valour in arms, and began to worship the CANTO XIII
 Baptist only, meaning the Florin on which the
 Baptist is stamped, she gave herself up wholly to
 the acquisition of wealth, and, therefore, will be un-
 fortunate in her warlike achievements, for, as long
 as the Florentines gave their minds to deeds of arms
 and to exertion, they were energetic and victorious,
 but when they turned their attention to rapacious
 harpies and accumulation of riches, although they
 might seem to be more prosperous and powerful,
 yet were they less honoured in their feats of arms,
 and, in their continual wars, were more and more
 weakened by their avarice if, therefore, some slight
 vestige of Mars were not still remaining in it, Flor-
 ence would many a time have met with the same
 destruction that she met from Attila.¹ This is
 ingenious and has support in other passages in
 which the Baptist stands for the coins stamped with
 his image, and devotion to him is only a sarcastic
 name for avarice.² Nevertheless, even at the risk of
 being charged with greater ingenuity, I would sug-
 gest another interpretation. This allusion to the
 baleful influence of Mars on Florence is put into the
 mouth of a suicide, and this must be remembered in
 our exposition of it. For it is as possible for a city
 to commit suicide as for an individual. Civil war
 is a whole community committing suicide, and civil
 war was the chronic state of Florence in Dante's
 day. The reference to Mars for ever making the
 city sad with his art, comes appropriately from a

¹ Quoted in Vernon's *Readings*, 1 449, 450

² *Inf* xxx 74, *Par* xviii 133, 134

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CANTO XIII suicide—his native city was always engaged in the same process of self-destruction. If it be objected that Dante speaks also of the good influence of Mars in that, but for a remnant of him, the city could not have been built, the answer is that this also is true. Dante recognized a Divine form of war, and therefore set martyrs, crusaders, and all soldiers of Christ in the planet Mars, the Fifth Heaven of the *Paradiso*. This is no proof that there is not an evil and suicidal form of it as well, and in this passage Dante sets the two before his countrymen—that chronic state of civil war which was the suicide of the community, and that nobler warfare for great ends which once rebuilt the city from its ashes, and might again rebuild it, even from the ruins of its own self-destructive passions.

**Spendthrift
Suicide**

One other type of suicide remains, if not the basest, at least the most amazing in its insanity—that, namely, represented by the two naked souls fleeing before the mastiffs. These had not, like the others, boldly thrown off their bodies by direct suicide, hence they are not changed into trees, but they had squandered in wild and insane recklessness the very means of life, until life itself had grown into an intolerable burden. The prodigality of the spendthrifts in Circle IV was mild and pardonable compared with theirs. That was a mere inability to resist the temptation to spend, but the prodigality of these souls had been a species of moral insanity, a wild and wanton destruction of their possessions. Lano, the one who escaped the dogs for the moment, is said to have been a member of the 'Spendthrift

Brigade' of Siena, a club of wild young rakes, CANTO XIII
 who vied with one another in the recklessness and
 rapidity with which they squandered their fortunes ¹
 Lano, having utterly ruined himself, joined the
 expedition which the joint forces of Florence and
 Siena undertook against Arezzo in 1288 At the
 ford of the Pieve (Parish) al Toppo, near Arezzo, the
 Sienese were caught in an ambush and cut to pieces,
 and it is said that Lano flung his life away in the
 fight rather than live to face the ruin which his own
 recklessness had brought upon him Napier, indeed,
 in his *Florentine History*, gives a totally different
 account 'As an example of the public spirit of
 these wars it may be mentioned that a citizen of
 Siena named Lano, who had expended all his pro-
 perty in order to appear with some distinction in
 the confederate camp, having the power to save
 himself in this encounter, chose rather to die in
 the ranks than return poor and dishonoured to his
 native city, and fell in a desperate attack which he
 made singly against the victors' ² It is probable,
 however, that the former account is the truth had
 Dante regarded Lano as a man who had ruined him-
 self through an excess of public spirit, he must have
 given some hint of so generous a motive Lano's
 companion, Jacomo da Sant' Andrea, who was
 caught and torn in pieces by the dogs, was, if pos-
 sible, insaner in his prodigality, as his crueller fate
 implies 'On one occasion, when travelling from

¹ Four other members of this Club are named in *Inf* xxix 125-132.
 See pp 405, 406

² *Florentine History*, Bk I. chap xii

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CANTO XIII Padua to Venice, he is said to have thrown away a large number of gold coins of the value of ten scudi (over £2) each, to see them make ducks and drakes on the lagoon. Another time he had some of his labourers' cottages burnt, in order that himself and a number of his guests might dry their wet clothes on returning from the chase. Like Nero, wishing to see a large conflagration, he set one of his own villas on fire, and watched till it was burnt down, together with all its outbuildings.¹ Really one cannot grudge the 'black she-mastiffs' their meal of such a fool, whatever they may represent. It has been suggested that they are symbols of pitiless creditors who pursue a debtor like hounds, and, when their claims are unsatisfied, seize his person, but obviously creditors do not carry their pursuit into the world to come. Rather by the mastiffs Dante means, not creditors, but the fear of creditors that last wild terror of poverty in which their earthly life closed has never left them, haunts and pursues their souls in that other world, and tears them there as here. Dante may have meant to warn us that any overwhelming terror created within us by our own sins, may become so rooted and grounded in our souls by the shock of death, that it will pursue and rend us for ever. We welcome death as a refuge, and, behold, the wood behind us is for ever black with the very fears from which we fled.

**Punishment -
Degradation
to lower form
of life**

The punishment of being turned into trees, which is allotted to Suicides, seems at first sight fantastic and unreal, yet it is far from being either. In the

¹ *Vernon's Readings*, i 443

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first place, Dante means us to understand that the CANTO XIII
man who flings off his body does not thereby escape
from existence, but simply dooms himself to a lower
form of life, is degraded from the animal to the
vegetable In the *Convito*, following Aristotle, he dis-
tinguishes the three principal powers of the human
soul as *vegetative*, *sensitive*, and *intellectual*, which
are so connected that the lower is the basis of the
higher 'The vegetative power, by which we live, is
the foundation upon which we *feel*, that is, see, hear,
taste, smell, and touch, and this vegetative power
of itself is a soul, as we see in all plants'¹ The
obvious idea of this punishment, therefore, is that
the suicide by his own act reduces himself to the
lowest power of his soul, the vegetative He has
violated his *intellectual* soul by an act contrary
to all right reason, he has flung away his *sensitive*
soul by destroying the body in which it resides, and
thus has reduced himself to the lowest term of his
existence In short, to put it in more modern form,
the great process of evolution is reversed Nor is
this a mere reading of modern ideas back into
Dante Aristotle, whom Dante avowedly follows
here, regards the human soul as a microcosm, an
epitome and summing up of all the faculties of the
other orders of animate existence, and the modern
theory of evolution is only a more scientific way of
saying the same thing Through untold ages, it de-
clares, man has climbed his painful way up through
all lower forms of life, and therefore represents in
himself the entire history and evolution of the

¹ *Conv* iii 2

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CANTO XIII universe. If, then, any man values the higher parts of his being—his sensitive and intellectual souls, *as, Dante would say—so lightly as to outrage and fling them away by suicide*, he thereby reverses this great process of evolution, and casts himself back to the stage from which he started. In this low vegetative stage, all the customary avenues to the outside world are necessarily closed. The human body is a mysterious system of such avenues, eye, ear, touch, and so on, but the suicide flings the mysterious system away, and with it the power of communication. **Loss of Speech** Dante indicates this by the difficulty of speech under which these vegetative souls labour. First of all, he tells us it is only when the Harpies tear off a leaf or branch that they can utter their grief at all.

‘The Harpies feeding then upon its leaves
Do pain create, and for the pain a window’¹

Even then the utterance is far from easy. For example, the speech of the ‘great thorn,’ when Dante tore off a twig, is compared to the hissing of a green brand in the fire.

As out of a green brand that is on fire
At one of the ends, and from the other drips
And hisses with the wind that is escaping,
So from that broken splint came forth together
Both words and blood.²

When we remember that Pier delle Vigne was a poet and orator, this impediment in his power of speech becomes much more significant. In short, instead of escaping from the sorrows to get rid

¹ *Inf.* xiii. 101, 102

² *Inf.* xiii. 40-44

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of which they threw off the flesh, these suicides find CANTO XIII themselves caught and imprisoned in another form of body, which affords their sorrows not even the relief of utterance.¹

The Harpies that brood in the branches of this weird forest have given rise to many interpretations. It is evident that Dante had the Third Book of the *Æneid* much in his mind when writing this Canto. we have seen how he drew from it the idea of souls turned into trees, and now from the same source he takes this symbol of the Harpies. There Virgil tells how they drove the Trojans from the Strophades, two small islands in the Ionian Sea. The word Harpies means 'snatchers,' hence they have been regarded as symbols of the sin itself—Suicide, the snatcher-away of life. Others take them to mean the self-will that leads to self-destruction, despair, haunting memories, remorse of conscience, and there may be truth in all of these conjectures. I prefer, however, to take them more generally as representing any and every unworthy cause that drives men to fling life away. In Greek mythology the Harpies are storm-winds which act as ministers of Divine vengeance, mysteriously snatching offenders away out of the visible world. In moral equivalent, they represent the storm-winds of human passion which sweep men violently out of life. 'Spiritually,' says Ruskin in *The Queen of*

¹ Comp. *Purg.* xxx. 13-15, where the Resurrection is spoken of as the re-clothing of the voice with the body.

As the Blessed at the last trump
Shall straightway rise up each one from his cavern,
The re-clothed voice singing Hallelujah

A various reading, however, gives *flush* for *voice*.

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CANTO XIII *the Air*, 'they are the gusts of vexatious, fretful, lawless passion, vain and overshadowing, discontented and lamenting, meagre and insane,—spirits of wasted energy, and wandering disease, and unappeased famine, and unsatisfied hope . . . Understand that, once, deeply—any who have ever known the weariness of vain desires, the pitiful, unconquerable, coiling and recoiling, and self-involved returns of some sickening famine and thirst of the heart—and you will know what was in the sound of the Harpy Celano's shriek from her rock, and why, in the seventh circle of the "Inferno," the Harpies make their nests in the warped branches of the trees that are the souls of suicides

Now the point of vital importance is that suicide is no real escape from these Harpies, the storm-winds of passion and misery and vain desire

'In that sleep of death what dreams may come!'

dreams more terrifying and hopeless than those from which men flee In the Sixth Book of the *Æneid* (434-437) Virgil says Æneas saw the souls of suicides in Hades suffering a doom so terrible that they would gladly exchange it for 'the poverty and hard toils' of earth, from which they had been so madly eager to escape Dante evidently had the same conviction, that suicide but intensifies the pain from which men flee The Harpies of passion which drove them out of this world go with them into the other, and brood for ever on the branches of the ruined and dishonoured soul The old agony is there, pent up within the hard bark of the tree, and the only

respite is a momentary relief of utterance when the Harpies of their old passions, feeding upon their leaves, rouse them from their brooding wordless grief into a wilder anguish. In the case of the Squanderers, it is obvious that death has proved no real escape, they are pursued by the hounds of their own terrors, and call aloud for a second death to save them from the first. Nothing is more terribly significant than Lano's wild cry as the ghostly pack swept after him, 'This time, haste thee, haste thee, Death!' Once before he had sought it, and, behold, it was no sanctuary from his miseries, and his doom now is to seek for ever, and for ever fail to find¹

One last punishment is reserved for the day of final Judgment. What of these suicides in the Resurrection²—will the bodies which they impiously flung away be restored to them, as to others? Pier delle Vigne replies that they will not, 'for 'tis not just to have what one casts off'. It has been questioned whether Dante is strictly orthodox in this. It is certainly the doctrine of the Church that at the Resurrection every soul will be reinvested with its own body. The only suicide, however, to whom Dante will allow this is Cato, who destroyed himself for the sake of liberty². And, indeed, at first sight this seems a great relief. Dante has already discussed the question whether the reunion of soul and body will increase the pain of the lost, and has answered it in the affirmative. Will it not then be

Bodies of
Suicides in the
Resurrection.

¹ Rev ix 6 'And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it, and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.'

² *Purg* i 73-75, where Virgil speaks of Cato's body as 'the vesture which at the great day shall be so bright.'

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CANTO XIII a mitigation of the punishment of suicides, that for
— them there is no such reunion? No, replies Dante, the pain only takes another form. Like all other souls of the dead, they must return for their bodies at the Resurrection, but not to be re-clothed in them. 'Here,' says Pier delle Vigne,

'Here shall we drag them and through the dismal
Forest our bodies shall suspended be,
Each to the thorn of its tormented shade,'¹—

tormented, obviously, by the eternal presence of its own self-murdered corpse. It is the idea so much insisted on already in every possible direction the suicide's hope of escape is utterly frustrated. The burden of the flesh which he could not bear for the few short years of earth will hang heavy on the soul for ever, and there will be none to deliver from 'the body of this death'

¹ *Inf.* XIII 106 108

CHAPTER XIV

CIRCLE VII —THE VIOLENT AGAINST GOD, NATURE AND ART

WE have passed through two of the three concentric Rings or Belts which form the Circle of Violence the River of Blood in which are plunged the Violent against their Neighbours, and the dark Forest, the trees of which are the souls of Suicides, the Violent against Themselves We now reach the central Ring, in which are punished the Violent against God, Nature, and Art When the travellers come to the inner edge of the Forest, they see a vast Plain of Sand, as dry and thick, says Dante, as the Libyan desert across which Cato of Utica made his terrible march of six days with the remnant of Pompey's army, after the battle of Pharsalia in 48 B C As the River of Blood and the Forest of Suicides are typical of the sins there punished, so this dry barren Sand-Waste is symbolic of the lives of the Violent against God and His offspring, Nature and Art, such Violence turns human life into a desert 'which rejecteth every plant.' On this barren plain Dante saw 'a horrible act of justice' a rain of 'dilated flakes of fire' was falling on it, silently and steadily, 'like snow among the Alps upon a windless day,' and as it fell the dry

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Circle of
Violence
Third Ring

The Plain of
Sand,

and Rain of
Fire

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—

sandy soil broke into flame like tinder, 'for doubling of the pain.' Under this rain of fire, pitiless, persistent, inevitable, herds of naked weeping souls suffered their eternal doom, according to their special form of the sin. Blasphemers against God lay stretched upon the burning ground with faces upturned to the fiery storm which the Heaven they had defied now poured down upon them Sodomites, the Violent against Nature, driven by their own unnatural passions, ran about perpetually, not daring to rest for fear of greater pain Usurers, the Violent against Art, were sitting crouched up, with eyes bent upon the sand, the symbol of their own barren, unproductive lives The only alleviation allowed is what Dante calls 'the dance of miserable hands,' flinging off, 'now here, now there,' the fresh fire-flakes as they fall

The Dykes of
Phlegethon

Not daring to venture on the Sandy Plain for fear of the fire, Virgil and Dante skirt the edge of it to the left, keeping along the margin of the Forest of Suicides After a conversation with one of the Blasphemers, they come at last to a place where a little rivulet of blood gushes from the wood, 'whose redness,' says Dante, 'still makes me shudder' It is, as we shall see, the overflow of Phlegethon the River of Blood, and is the symbol of the sins of hot passion punished in this central region of the Inferno Flowing across the Plain to its centre, it plunges in one wild leap down a vast precipice to the Circle of Fraud beneath At the part of its course across the sand, it has two peculiarities. One is that its bottom and sides have become petrified,

thus forming a stony channel which keeps it from spreading over the Plain and losing itself in the sand. For some reason, perhaps mere love of definiteness, Dante is very exact about the size of the walls of this channel. He compares them to the sea-dykes which the Flemings had built between Bruges and Wissant, a well-known mediæval port near Calais, to keep out the waves, and to the walls by which the Paduans protected their houses and villages from the floods of the Brenta—‘albeit not so lofty nor so thick’ On the level top of one of these stone margins the poet and his guide walked to the centre of the Sandy Waste. It is possible that all this is only a poetic device to provide a pathway for the travellers; but if the stone channel has any symbolic significance, it perhaps indicates the petrifying power which sins of hot-blooded violence have upon the human heart¹. The other peculiarity of the River in this part of its course is that it sends forth a smoke or mist, which quenches the flakes of fire that rain down upon the sand. This also may be nothing more than an ingenious device to get the travellers across the Plain unscorched by the falling flames, but from the cast of Dante’s mind it is much likelier that some symbolism is meant, though it is extremely difficult to say what. If we connect it with the explanation of the rivers of Hell which Virgil presently gives, this mist rising from one of them may mean the power which the mere contemplation of such floods of sin and suffering has to quench in a

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¹ Comp. *Inf.* xviii 1–3. The whole of Malebolge is ‘of stone and of an iron colour’ in symbol of the hardness of heart of the Fraudulent.

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—

man's heart the sins of this Plain, and therefore the flames which are their punishment For, as we shall see, the rivers are composed of the tears which outrage and wrong have wrung from countless generations, and the mere sight of such 'waters of affliction' may well wrap a man in a mist of pity and grief, which will effectually quench all desire for the sins which are their source.

The Old Man
of Crete
The Image
of Time

We now come to the mystical account of the four infernal rivers which Virgil gives to Dante as they stand beside this blood-red stream, the most notable thing, he says, that they have yet seen in Hell. Within Mount Ida in Crete, 'once glad with waters and with leaves,' but now 'deserted as a thing outworn,' stands erect 'a great Old Man,' his back turned to Damietta in Egypt, his face gazing at Rome 'as if it were his mirror'

'His head is fashioned of refined gold
And of pure silver are the arms and breast,
Then he is of brass as far down as the fork,
From that point downward all is chosen iron,
Save that the right foot is of kiln-baked clay,
And more he stands on that than on the other'¹

With the exception of the golden head, each part is cleft by a fissure through which tears drop into the cavern, and thence fall into the abyss of Hell

'From rock to rock they fall into this valley,
Acheron, Styx, and Phlegethon they form,
Then downward go along this narrow sluice
Unto that point where is no more descending,
They form Cocytus'²

¹ *Inf.* XIV 106-111

² *Inf.* XIV 115-119

The interpretation is far from easy. Crete seems to be chosen for several reasons. In that Third Book of the *Æneid*, so often alluded to in this part of the *Inferno*, Virgil speaks of Crete as the nursery of the Trojan race and therefore of the Roman, and this is probably one reason why 'the great Old Man' is gazing towards Rome as to his mirror¹. But in addition to this, Crete was regarded as the cradle of the human race as a whole, situated as it is in the centre of the then known world, Asia, Africa, and Europe. In short, it was the heathen Garden of Eden, and Dante, here as in so many other places, easily adapts the Greek mythology to his own uses. It was under Saturn, its king in the Golden Age, that 'the world of old was chaste'. Then too it was 'glad with waters and with leaves,' in allusion to the fertility for which Crete was once famous. The change from that Golden Age, when it was as 'Eden the garden of God,' to the sad degenerate days when Dante saw it sitting in the sea 'a wasted land' and 'a thing outworn,' is to his mind an image of the way in which the sins of the race reduce the world which God made very good to a barren wilderness, like the Sandy Waste beside which he was standing.

Of the 'great Old Man,' a multitude of interpretations have been given, with most of which it is not necessary to trouble ourselves. There are, however, two leading views which are not necessarily in any real antagonism. It is quite conceivable that Dante had both before his mind. All agree, of course, in tracing the image to the dream of Nebuchadnezzar

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Crete, the
heathen Gar-
den of Eden

¹ *Æn.* iii, 104 106

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—

in *Daniel* (ii. 32, 33) 'This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay,' though it is to be noticed that, as Toynbee points out, 'Dante differs from Daniel in making the brass terminate with the trunk.' The first interpretation to which reference has been made is, like that of Daniel, a political one. The image stands for the Roman Empire in the successive stages of its history, and the working out of the symbolism may be given in Dean Plumptre's words: 'The "grand old form" is the symbol of the ideal of universal history as seen in the Roman Empire. He looks away from Damietta on the eastern border of Egypt, *i. e.* westward, for that, from the poet's standpoint, is the direction of human progress. Possibly there is a side glance at the fact that the time of the Crusades, in which Damietta had played so prominent a part, is now over, and that the work of the Empire now lay in the West rather than the East'.¹ He looks towards Rome as a mirror, for it is there only, as Dante thought, as the seat of a true Empire and a true Church, that his ideal of monarchy could be realized. His golden age was that of Augustus, the silver that of the beginning of the decline and fall, the third, that of the more complete decadence

¹ The reference may be to the Crusades as a mistaken effort to turn the stream of history back to its source in the East. Comp. Bishop Berkeley's lines

'Westward the course of empire takes its way,
The four first acts already past
A fifth shall close the drama with the day
Time's noblest offspring is the last

The fifth act is one Dante could scarcely foresee—America

which ended in the division of the Eastern and Western empires. The legs of iron point to the endless wars of the two empires. The "right foot" of clay is the Western empire, which no longer rests on a firm foundation, the last hope of a strong empire having perished with the Hohenstaufen dynasty, but on the crumbling support of a purely selfish policy, leading, as it did, to corruption in both Church and Empire, and to internal dissensions in every city in Italy.

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—

One notes the terrible grandeur of the symbol. The sorrows and the tears of men, consequent on the gradual deterioration of the Empire, are the source from which flow, one out of the other, the rivers of Hell, the woes of the condemned. Cocytus, as the river of wailing, receives them all'

There can be little doubt that some such thought was in Dante's mind, for it certainly fits in with his general political theories. One might, indeed, suggest, with many of the older commentators, that the legs represent the Church and the Empire, rather than the two empires, Eastern and Western, the right foot of baked clay being the Church. Although mankind leans most upon it, it is by far the weaker support, and the clay may crumble at any moment. Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe that Dante was thinking only of the Roman Empire and the Church. He knew that men were sinning and suffering long before the Empire existed, and that the sins and tears of every generation, except the first golden one, must find their way down to this 'lowest swamp of all the universe'. The 'great Old Man' is therefore the image of Time, the gradual deterioration of the

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—

human race as a whole from its Golden Age when 'the world was chaste,' down through the successive stages of its history, until it has reached its lowest degradation, resting most upon its right foot which is clay. If, as seems likely, this right foot is the Church, we can see to what an almost hopeless pass this world has come in Dante's judgment, when that which ought to be the strongest support of the whole body of mankind was a foot of crumbling clay

The Four
Rivers of Hell,
and Lethe

As pointed out in a previous chapter, the four rivers of Hell, thus formed by the tears of Time, seem to be in reality one and the same river, changing both name and appearance as it drains down through the lost world. They are the infernal counterpart of the fourfold river of Eden, or perhaps of the twofold river of the new Eden on the top of Mount Purgatory. The great moral idea which they represent to Dante's mind is that there is not a tear shed on earth through man's inhumanity to man, which does not flow back in rivers of agony upon those who wrung them from their fellows. Not a tear is lost, every one has to be paid for,—yes, the very tears of the penitent and forgiven. When Dante passes beyond Cocytus, the last river of Hell, and climbs the dark passage on the other side which leads up to 'the bright world,' he hears the sound of a rivulet which he cannot see because it has eaten a passage for itself in the stone—in all probability the tears that fall from another mountain than Ida in Crete, the Mount of Purification. The sins and tears even of the penitent and forgiven flow back to the infernal source from which they came.

Turning now to the wretched inhabitants of this barren land, let us see once more what their punishments are. Violence against God takes three forms. There is, first, direct defiance and blasphemy of the Most High, and sinners of this kind are flung upon the sand, with upturned faces, thus enduring the double pain of the fiery rain above and the burning soil beneath. Violence against Nature—which is in- Nature, direct violence against God, whose child Nature is—is punished by a perpetual unrest: the Sodomites are kept running over the burning sand, and if one dares to stop for a moment, the penalty is to lie for a hundred years without liberty to cast off the falling flames. Violence against Art or Work—a still more Art indirect form of Violence against God, since Art is His ‘grandchild’—is Usury, and the Usurers sit under the fiery storm, crouching as of old over their money-bags, and gazing for ever at the Waste of Sand, the emblem of their own barren and wasted lives.

It is obvious that although, as Dante says, these three classes are set under ‘a diverse law,’ there are certain elements of punishment common to them all. One is the barrenness of which the sandy desert is the symbol. The conditions of fruitfulness are humble submission to God, obedience to His ordained order of Nature, and due fulfilment of His great law of Art or Work, ‘In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread’; and to defy those conditions is to reduce all life to a desert. Dante warns us that to persist in this defiance for a lifetime is to doom ourselves to the continuance of the same empty, profitless, barren existence in the world to come. We ploughed the

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The Violent
against God,

Punishments
common to
all
Barrenness

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—

sand here, and the sand becomes our eternal portion —without grass or flower or tree to refresh the eye. No one can tell how flat, barren, and arid may stretch the desert wastes of the soul that has spent its earthly years in defiance of the very conditions of fruitfulness which God has ordained.

Rain of Fire

The fiery rain represents the intolerable anguish of this empty barren existence, which has thus violated the natural laws of a fruitful and happy life. It is suggested, of course, by the 'brimstone and fire' which God rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah,—Sodomy being one of the sins here punished. Dante is not thinking of literal material fire. If, as he firmly believed, we are made to find our peace and joy in God and in His ordinances of Nature and Work, it follows that long and persistent defiance and violation of this creative purpose must produce in the soul a tormenting, burning, inescapable pain. Nor is it merely the pain of unfruitfulness: it is also the sense of the direct and immediate anger and judgment of Heaven falling on the soul. In other parts of the *Inferno* God has, so to speak, delegated His judgment to intermediate means and agents, but here He keeps in His own hands the doom of those who have directly defied Himself. The Blasphemer, for example, measures himself directly against the Almighty, intending, as Aquinas says, to 'wound His honour', and this direct striking at God recoils on the soul in that burning sense of His direct and immediate anger, which Dante represents under the form of the rain of fire from Heaven.

A third punishment which is common to the three classes of sinners here, is the disfigurement which the fiery rain works on face and form Dante tells us that the face of Brunetto Latini, which he remembered gratefully on earth as 'dear, and good, and fatherly,' was now so scorched and 'baked' that he had difficulty in recognizing it. Of a certain troop of unnatural sinners he exclaims

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—
Disfigurement
of Soul.

Ah me! what wounds I saw upon their limbs,
Recent and ancient by the flames burnt in!
It pains me still but to remember it!¹

Dante's meaning seems to be that while some sins register themselves on the body in this present life in scars and wounds and features brutified, there are others which leave no such visible trace On earth, for instance, Ser Brunetto's kind and fatherly countenance showed no sign of the unnatural lust which in the end carried him down to this Circle, nevertheless, now that the veil of the flesh is stripped away, the marks of its scorching fires are only too visible upon his naked soul So also with the others As we shall see, many of them were great soldiers, statesmen, and men of letters, who bore in this world a dignified and honourable front, which gave no hint to their fellows of the degrading, disfiguring passions within These become visible only when death strips the soul to utter nakedness It reminds us of Plato's myth of judgment in the *Gorgias* In the time when Cronos was king of the gods, and even under Zeus, judgment was passed on men

¹ *Inf* XVI 10 12

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while still clothed in flesh The consequence was that the judge, being unable to discern the soul infallibly through this clothing, sometimes erred and sent men to the wrong places in the other world. To remedy this, Zeus ordained that judgment be postponed till after death, for 'when a man is stripped of the body, all the natural or acquired affections of the soul are laid open to view. And when they come to the judge, as those from Asia come to Rhadamanthus, he places them near him and inspects them quite impartially, not knowing whose the soul is perhaps he may lay hands on the soul of the great king, or some other king or potentate, who has no soundness in him, but his soul is marked with the whip, and is full of the prints and scars of perjuries and crimes with which each action has stained him, and he is all crooked with falsehood and imposture, and has no straightness, because he has lived without truth Him Rhadamanthus beholds, full of all deformity and disproportion, which is caused by licence and luxury and insolence and incontinence, and despatches him ignominiously to his prison, and there he undergoes the punishment which he deserves'¹ This contrast between the fair appearance of the flesh and the scarred deformity of the soul within, is one of the leading ideas of this punishment,—between the countenance of Ser Brunetto as Dante remembers it on earth, 'dear, and good, and fatherly,' and the countenance of his naked soul as he sees it in this Circle, baked and scorched almost past recognition by the fires of the

¹ *Gorgias*, 523 525

unnatural passions which here he concealed behind the kindly venerable face.

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These three penalties—the barren sand, the fiery rain, and the disfigurement of the soul—are common to the three classes of sinners here tormented, but in addition, each has other punishments peculiar to itself, according to the special form of its sin. Take first the Violent against God directly, defiers and blasphemers of the Almighty. Dante tells us that they are far fewer in number than those who are running round the Plain, that is, the Sodomites. The reason is obvious. Not many are bold enough to give a direct defiance to Heaven. ‘The blasphemer,’ says Aquinas, ‘intends to wound the honour of God,’¹ but few have the reckless evil courage necessary for a sin so desperate and high-handed. On the other hand, multitudes who shrink from this open defiance of God live daily in a secret defiance, by the violation of that great natural order of things which He has ordained. Open and direct blasphemers and defiers, says Dante, suffer a double pain. Flung on their backs upon the ground, they endure the burning sand beneath and the fiery wrath of Heaven on their upturned faces. This was the attitude of their faces when they lifted them to Heaven in wild and blasphemous defiance, and now they are compelled to maintain it for ever. In one important point, however, their general attitude is wofully changed. In the old blasphemous days they *stood* and defied their Maker now they are flung upon the ground, beaten down by the storm

Punishments
peculiar to
each Class

Violent
against God

¹ *Summa*, II II Q. XIII a. 3

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—

of His indignation, and compelled to feel throughout eternity their absolute impotence against the Almightyness which they so insanely challenged. Now at last they recognize their madness, and bewail it in loud lamentations. We are told that they had 'their tongues more loosed to pain' than the other classes of sinners on the sand. It may be because their pain was greater, but the more probable reason is that Dante wishes to indicate the cowardice which commonly lies at the root of blasphemy. To the man himself it may seem an act of magnificent and almost superhuman courage, when he stands up before high Heaven and lifts his face in blasphemy against his Maker, but, in nine cases out of ten, it is not courage but bravado. The moment the Power he has defied casts him to the ground and storms over him, the thin veil of bravado is swept away and the coward beneath screams aloud in his terror. It is perhaps for this reason that Dante passes all the others, and singles out for notice one soul who is no coward. As they are skirting the edge of the Forest of Suicides to avoid the fiery rain, Dante asks Virgil,

Capaneus

'Who is that great one who seems not to heed
The fire, and lies disdainful and contorted,
So that the rain seems not to ripen him?'¹

Before Virgil can reply, this disdainful soul, perceiving that they are speaking of him, answers for himself, 'What I was living, that am I dead!' It is Capaneus, one of the seven kings who besieged Thebes. Having blasphemously challenged the gods

¹ *Inf.* xiv 46-48.

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to come to the rescue of the city, Jupiter struck him with a thunderbolt as he was scaling the walls. So indomitable was his spirit that even then he refused to fall, but remained leaning against the walls of the city till he died. Now, indeed, he can stand no longer, the storm of fire beats him to the ground and keeps him there, but it cannot break his spirit, or wring from him one cowardly cry of agony. Still he hurls defiance at Jove and challenges him to do his worst. He may weary out Vulcan and all his smiths in Etna forging bolts to hurl at him with all his might, but never would he give him the satisfaction of 'a joyous vengeance'. At first, indeed, we cannot help feeling a touch of admiration for this strong indomitable soul who refuses to cower and whimper like the rest, but Virgil rebukes our admiration. It is strength, but it is not admirable: such final and invincible hardening of the soul against God in bitter defiance recoils in torture on the man himself, and, as Virgil says, more than any punishment from without, fills up the measure of his pain.

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—

'O Capaneus, in that is not extinguished
Thine arrogance, thou punished art the more,
Not any torment, saving thine own rage,
Would be unto thy fury pain complete'¹

Turning now to the Violent against Nature, we find many points of perhaps the greatest and most painful interest in the *Inferno*. The narrative brings us into contact for the most part with well-known Florentines of Dante's day and of the generation

The Violent
against
Nature

¹ *Inf.* xiv. 63-66

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XIV - XVII
78
—

Brunetto
Latini

immediately preceding, so that any adequate understanding of the passage involves some knowledge of the contemporary history of the city Dante tells us that, when Virgil and he had walked on the stone dyke of the River of Blood so far that they had quite lost sight of the Forest of Suicides, they encountered a troop of Sodomites running alongside the bank in the opposite direction, their faces and limbs scarred and scorched with the fiery rain. As they hurry past, they peer curiously at the two strangers as men do at one another under the dubious light of a new moon, and 'sharpening their eyebrows' as an old tailor does at the needle's eye an allusion perhaps, as some think, to the way in which this sin loves the darkness Suddenly one of the souls, recognizing Dante, seizes the hem of his garment, crying, 'What a marvel!' In spite of his scorched countenance, Dante knew him, and, bending his own face down to his, gave a cry of dismay and grief, 'Are *you* here, Ser Brunetto?' It is, as we have seen, Brunetto Latini, to whom Dante pays a great debt of affectionate reverence and gratitude

'If my entreaty wholly were fulfilled,'
Replied I to him, 'not yet would you be
In banishment from human nature placed
For in my mind is fixed, and touches now
My heart, the dear and good paternal image
Of you, when in the world, from hour to hour,
You taught me how man makes himself eternal,
And how much I am grateful, while I live
Behoves that in my tongue should be discerned'¹

It seems impossible now to discover what exactly

¹ *Inf* xv 79-87

it is that lies behind these lines The view formerly held that Brunetto Latini was Dante's schoolmaster or tutor, is now generally abandoned. Mr Toynbee declares it impossible, 'since he was about fifty-five when Dante was born', but there seems no great impossibility about it when we remember that he lived till 1294, twenty-nine years after the poet's birth In any case, it is obvious that Dante held him in the most grateful affection and reverence for having taught him 'how man makes himself eternal,' whether in the sense of rising into the eternal spiritual life, or, more probably, of gaining the lower eternity of fame This teacher of Dante was one of the best-known men of his day in Florence By profession he was, like Dante's father, a notary, and it is to this the title '*Ser*' refers¹ He took a prominent part in public affairs, as ambassador, secretary to the Florentine government, prior, and one of the public orators of the city 'His influence and authority with the Florentines,' says Toynbee, 'are attested by the fact that his name appears in no less than thirty-five public documents (between October 21, 1282, and July 22, 1292) as having been consulted by the government on various important matters, and for the most part it is recorded that his advice was followed' Villani's notice of his death is interesting as showing that he was regarded as the teacher and guide, not of Dante alone, but of the whole city of Florence 'In the said year 1294 there died in Florence a worthy citizen whose name was M Brunetto

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XIV-XVII.
78
—

¹ Vernon says '*Ser* is the shortened form of *sere*, for which modern usage has substituted *signore*, formerly a title of nobility and of superiority'

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XIV-XVII.
78
—

Latini, who was a great philosopher, and was a perfect master in rhetoric, understanding both how to speak well and how to write well. And he it was which commented upon the rhetoric of Tully, and made the good and useful book called "The Treasure," and "The Little Treasure," and "The Key to the Treasure," and many other books in philosophy, and concerning vices and virtues. And he was secretary of our commonwealth. He was a worldly man, but we have made mention of him because it was he who was the beginner and master in refining the Florentines and in teaching them how to speak well, and how to guide and rule our republic according to policy.¹ The 'Tesoro' or 'Treasure' here named was Latini's greatest work, and that on which, in his own opinion, his fame rested, for just as he leaves Dante he says

'Commended unto thee be my "Tesoro,"
In which I still live, and no more I ask.'²

It was an encyclopædia of history, ethics, and rhetoric, written in French, and undoubtedly used by Dante as one of his authorities.

Ser Brunetto, being forbidden to rest for a moment on pain of greater punishment, begs leave to escort Dante a little way upon his journey, and

¹ *Vollani*, viii 10.

² *Inf.* xv 119, 120. 'The Italians' says Lowell, 'claim humor for Dante. We have never been able to find it, unless it be in that passage where Brunetto Latini lingers under the burning shower to recommend his *Tesoro* to his former pupil. There is a comical touch of nature in an author's solicitude for his little work, not, as in Fielding's case, after *its*, but his own damnation. We are not sure, but we fancy we catch the momentary flicker of a smile across those serious eyes of Dante's

the poet, not daring to descend to the plain, walks on with his head bent towards his old friend as in reverence. Brunetto then asks how he came hither before his last day, and who is his guide Dante's reply is interesting, because there is an undoubted reference to another of Brunetto's works, the 'Tesoretto' or 'Little Treasure'

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78
—

'Up there above us in the life serene,
I answered him, 'I lost me in a valley,
Or ever yet my age had been completed
But yesternorn I turned my back upon it,
This one appeared to me, returning thither,
And homeward leadeth me along this road '¹

The very form of this reply cannot but have recalled to Brunetto's mind his own poem, the 'Tesoretto,' which is the narrative of a similar pilgrimage To quote Longfellow's note 'Ser Brunetto, returning from an embassy to King Alphonso of Spain, meets on the plain of Roncesvalles a student of Bologna, riding on a bay mule, who informs him that the Guelfs have been banished from Florence Whereupon Ser Brunetto, plunged in meditation and sorrow, loses the high-road and wanders in a wondrous forest. Here he discovers the august and gigantic figure of Nature, who relates to him the creation of the world, and gives him a banner to protect him through the forest, in which he meets with no adventures, but with the Virtues and Vices, Philosophy, Fortune, Ovid, and the God of Love, and sundry other characters. . He then emerges from the forest, and confesses himself to the Monks of Montpelher, after

¹ *Inf* xv 49-54

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—

Brunetto's
Prophecy
concerning
Dante

which he goes back into the forest again, and suddenly finds himself on the summit of Olympus.' In this poem he speaks against the very sin for which he is condemned to this Circle, and admits that he was 'a little wee bit worldly,' as Dr Moore translates 'mondanetto,' the playful diminutive coined by Ser Brunetto to describe his own character.

He then proceeds to encourage Dante in his pilgrimage he has but to follow his star to reach 'the glorious port' He warns him, however, that his good deeds will make him enemies of

'That ungrateful and malignant people
Which of old time from Fiesole descended,
And smacks still of the mountain and the granite'¹

He tells him also to cleanse himself of Florentine avarice, envy, and pride, and to hold himself aloof from both the parties that will strive to gain him, Blacks and Whites He winds up with a warning to 'the beasts of Fiesole' to make litter of themselves, but not of the plant, 'in which revives the holy seed of the Romans' The reference is to the tradition that Florence was founded after the Romans had destroyed Fiesole and compelled the remnant of its inhabitants to live in the new city. Dante is here claiming his descent from the nobler Roman stock, and protesting against the treatment he had received from 'the beasts of Fiesole,' the more rude and savage part of the population Villani takes the same view of the two sections 'It is not to be wondered at that the Florentines are always at war and strife among themselves,

¹ *Inf* xv 61-63

VIOLENT AGAINST NATURE 287

being born and descended from two peoples so contrary and hostile and different in habits as were the noble Romans in their virtue and the rude Fiesolans fierce in war.¹ Dante notes Ser Brunetto's warning carefully it is the third he has received since he entered the Inferno, and he will keep all three to be glossed by a Lady who can do it, if he reach her Meantime, he declares himself ready for every fate

CANTOS
XIV -XVII.
78
—

‘Therefore let Fortune turn her wheel around
As it may please her, and the churl his mattock ’²

As they proceed, Dante asks Ser Brunetto to name some of the highest and most noted of his companions, and receives the extraordinary answer that they were all, like himself, famous and learned men

Some of
Brunetto's
Companions.

‘Know then, in sum, that all of them were clerks,
And men of letters great and of great fame,
In the world tainted with the selfsame sin ’³

He names only three of them Against the first, Priscian the great grammarian, no evidence of guilt exists, and it has been thought that Dante names him simply as typical of teachers of the young, who, as a class, had an evil reputation for this sin. It is entirely unlikely, however, that Dante would thus brand an innocent man with infamy, the probability is that he followed some story or tradition accepted in his day The second is Francesco d'Accorso, professor of Civil Law at Bologna, son of the famous jurist, Accursius, who wrote the *Great Gloss* on the

¹ *Villani*, i 38.

² *Inf* xv 95, 96

³ *Inf* xv 103-108

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XIV-XVII
78
—

Code of Justinian At the invitation of Edward I. he came to England and lectured for some time at Oxford. The last soul mentioned is spoken of with far greater contempt as 'scurf'

'That one, who by the servant of the servants
From Arno was transferred to Bacchiglione,
Where he has left his sin-exhausted nerves'¹

'The servant of servants' is Pope Boniface VIII., whose duty it was to depose a bishop whose life was a scandal to the Church, instead of transferring him to a new see. The name of this shameless sinner was Andrea de' Mozzi, bishop of Florence from 1287 to 1295, in which year, on account of his evil fame, he was translated to the see of Vicenza, near the river Bacchiglione. 'What is most interesting about him,' as Sibbald says, 'is that he was Dante's chief pastor during his early manhood, and is consigned by him to the same disgraceful circle of Inferno as his beloved master, Brunetto Latini—a terrible evidence of the corruption of life among the churchmen as well as the scholars of the thirteenth century.' One can imagine the shock to his faith in human nature it must have been when Dante discovered that these two men were polluted with this shameful vice. The one had taught him 'how to make himself eternal' here on earth, it was the duty of the other to teach him 'how to make himself eternal' in heaven and bitter indeed must have been the discovery that teacher and pastor alike were being consumed by the fires of degrading and unnatural passions. Ser Brunetto has time to tell

¹ *Inf.* xv 110-114

no more: a smoke upon the Plain warns him that people are approaching with whom he was forbidden to consort, and he suddenly darts away to rejoin his own gang, as swiftly as the winner of the race for the Green Cloth at Verona

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XIV-XVII.
78
—

The two pilgrims pursue their journey on the top of the dyke until there strikes on their ears the first reverberation of the River of Blood, like the hum of bees, as it falls over the great precipice that leads to the next Circle Suddenly, from a troop of sinners on the Plain three shades separate themselves, and come running towards Dante, beseeching him to stop. They are Florentines, and have recognized him by his dress as coming from their 'depraved city' Dante is almost overcome with pity at the sight of the wounds which the fire has burnt in upon their limbs, and Virgil bids him wait and be courteous to them,—but for the fire, it were fitter that he should haste to them than they to him The three shades then had recourse to a singular device in order to hold a conversation with Dante Forbidden to stand still on pain of a great increase of their punishment, instead of turning back with him as Brunetto Latini did, the three laid hold of each other like wrestlers, formed themselves into a 'wheel,' and kept whirling round on the same spot, each directing his eyes to the poet in such wise that, as he puts it, their feet and their necks journeyed in opposite directions. It is uncertain what symbolic significance this revolving human wheel may have, it may be nothing more than an ingenious device to escape the punishment of standing still If anything

The Human
Wheel

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XIV -XVII
78
—

further is meant, perhaps Dante wished to indicate that the three had been joined in a similar companionship on earth in the unnatural vices which consigned them to this Circle.

Jacopo
Rusticucci

Guido Guerra

Tegghiaio
Aldobrandi

All three had been greatly distinguished in war and council a generation earlier. The least renowned is he who here acts as spokesman, Jacopo Rusticucci, a man sprung from the people, whose prudence and courage gave him great weight in the public affairs of the city. He lays the blame of his perdition on his 'savage wife'. The second is a much more distinguished man, Guido Guerra, of the powerful family of the Conti Guidi, whose great castles and strongholds are scattered everywhere throughout the Casentino and Romagna. He is called here the 'grandson of the good Gualdrada,' daughter of that Bellincione de' Ravignani, of whom Dante's forefather, Cacciaguida, speaks with great respect in the *Paradiso*.¹ His name Guerra (War) is said to have been due to his devotion to a soldier's life from youth to old age. Though his family were Imperialists, he joined the Guelph party and fought against Manfred at the battle of Benevento in 1265. In the year 1260 he was the head of the party of the nobles of Florence who did their utmost to dissuade the citizens from the expedition against Siena, which ended in the disastrous defeat of Montaperti and the wholesale expulsion of the Guelphs. The spokesman for the nobles on that occasion was the third shade in this 'wheel,' Tegghiaio Aldobrandi of the Adimari family, 'a wise knight and valiant in arms,

¹ *Par.* xv 112, xvi 94

and of great authority,' as Villani characterizes him. After his speech against the expedition, one of the 'popolani' taunted him with cowardice, whereupon Tegghiaio dared him in the day of battle to follow where he would lead. Dante says his 'voice ought to have been accepted in the world above'

CANTOS
XIV-XVII.
78
—

The three shades make eager inquiry concerning their native city. A soul had recently come from it, a certain Guglielmo Borsiere, who had increased their torment by his account of the state of Florence. They beg Dante, therefore, to tell them if courtesy and valour abide in it as of old. The poet can only confirm their worst fears: the ancient nobility of character is dead, new inhabitants have come, upstarts who have made 'sudden gains,' and the result is pride and extravagance which fill the city with misery¹. The three, who love their country still even in Hell, look at each other sadly as men who accept the unwelcome truth, and then, after begging Dante to speak of them to the people when he sees again 'the beauteous stars,' the 'wheel' breaks, and the swift legs seem wings as the three vanish in the rain of fire, ere one could say Amen.

Guglielmo
Borsiere.

This is a long story, but it is necessary to have it before us in order to see clearly Dante's estimate of this sin. It is, it must be confessed, with a feeling of amazement that we watch the reverence which he pays to men guilty of so unnatural

Dante's
Strange
Estimate of
this Sin

¹ Comp. *Conv.* iv 12. 'And what else daily endangers and destroys cities, countries, individual persons, so much as the new amassing of riches by some man? The which amassing discovers new desires, to the fulfilment of which it is not possible to come without injury to some one.'

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CANTOS
XIV-XVII.
78
—

a vice. He seems to have no abhorrence of it, such, for example, as he felt in the case of Filippo Argenti in the Circle of Wrath. Even Virgil, who represents Reason, and who warmly embraced Dante for his indignation against Argenti, has not one word of reprobation for these more shameful sinners. On the contrary, he tells him they are worthy of his courtesy, and that it were more becoming he should run to them than they to him. Had the fiery rain allowed, Dante would have thrown himself down among them, and he thinks his Teacher would have permitted it. His reverence for Ser Brunetto is seen in every word and gesture; and his admiration for the three Florentines who formed the 'wheel' is almost as great. He assures them that his feeling for them is sorrow, not disdain, and adds

'I of your city am, and evermore
Your labours and your honoured names
I with affection have retraced and heard'¹

Now, undoubtedly all this reverence is very perplexing. For one thing, why did it not prompt him to draw the kindly veil of silence over the sins and frailties of men who had left such honourable names behind them? As Scartazzini says, 'Brunetto may have been notoriously guilty, but why did Dante play the part of Ham, instead of following the example of Shem and Japheth?'² But there is a much greater difficulty than this. Is it possible that a man like Dante had no natural disgust for this unnatural sin? Was he, as some almost hint, con-

¹ *Inf.* xvi 58-60

² *Companion to Dante*, p. 431.

scious of a taint of it in himself? Probably the explanation is, in part, 'that in the thirteenth century unnatural crimes were so exceedingly prevalent, that men guilty of them did not incur that loathing and horror which they would inspire in modern times; and that Dante, though obliged, from the theological point of view, to brand them as sinners punished for deadly sins, yet would not look upon them, from the human point of view, as men so dishonoured, that he should shrink from consorting with them on terms of friendship'¹ Doubtless there is some truth in this, but it is by no means the whole truth, and we shall miss the deepest lesson of this part of the poem if we explain everything by a difference in the moral standard of the thirteenth century In reality, Dante has no mercy on this sin. It is a vice, he says, which banishes a man from human nature. But what touches him with a pity which is half-terror is the fact that this degrading and unnatural vice can and does co-exist with the highest gifts of intellect and valour This union in the same breast of elements so incongruous and incompatible, is a new and dreadful touch of unnaturalness added to all the rest We feel this unnaturalness when Brunetto denounces the Florentines as 'a people avaricious, envious, proud', and when the souls of the 'wheel' bewail the decay of 'valour and courtesy' in their native city it is like Satan reproving sin. And just this is, to Dante's mind, the horror and the pity of it—this unnatural combination in the same man of high intellect and

CANTOS
XIV-XVII
78
—

¹ Vernon's *Readings*, 1 504.

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CANTOS
XIV-XVII
78
—

many virtues with a vice which banishes him from human nature. In these days when it is half expected that education will make the whole world virtuous, our first instinctive thought is that a highly intellectual man is, as a matter of course, raised above so low and degrading a vice as that which destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, yet Dante seems to hint that men of intellect and education lie peculiarly open to this particular sin. Probably, as Plumptre says, his knowledge of several university cities to which he wandered amply justified all he here writes. 'Roger Bacon speaks of its prevalence in Paris, noting by the way that Louis IX. had banished many foreign teachers as guilty of it. It was the prominent charge brought against the Templars by Philip le Bel. Purvey, in the preface to what is known as *Wyklif's Bible*, mourns over its prevalence at Oxford.' The plain truth seems to be what Dante here insists on—that the highest and the lowest elements of human nature, the intellect of a god and the passions of the brute, lie close together, and that frequently the passions are so violent that they break through every restraint of education and culture. The tree of knowledge is not the tree of life. No learning or genius, no valour, or courtesy, or patriotic virtue, can ward off the infernal effects of unnatural passions, once they are allowed to gain the mastery. Dante and Reason personified in Virgil say all they can for these souls: they were scholars, statesmen, soldiers,—kindly, wise, brave, courteous,—public-spirited citizens and lovers of their country; yet, reverence and love them as they may, they are

in no doubt of the inevitable issue of such sins as they have been guilty of they change the soul into a waste of barren sand, they rain down upon it a fiery pain, they scorch its countenance and limbs almost beyond recognition, and they drive their victims on in an unrest which knows no respite. How serious was Dante's view of this sin will be apparent if we compare its punishment with that of Sensuality in the Second Circle. There the souls are tormented with the same restlessness of their own passions, but there are great and significant differences. The agent of their punishment is wind, not fire, they float on the hurricane instead of toiling across a burning sand which slips beneath their feet; and their souls remain undisfigured. The obvious reason for this vast difference in the punishments is that in the one case the sin is natural, and in the other unnatural. A sin which violates Nature must produce a far greater disfigurement of soul and a more burning restlessness, than one which is only the excess of a natural power and appetite.

CANTOS
XIV - XVII.
78
—

CHAPTER XV

CIRCLE VII —THE VIOLENT AGAINST ART, AND THE CASTING AWAY OF THE CORD

CANTOS
XVI 91-
XVII 78
—
The Violent
against Art

Usurers

WE have seen the punishments of two classes of the Violent—against God and against Nature, we come now to those inflicted on the Violent against Art. As explained in a previous chapter, Art means human Work Dante's view is that man in his Art or Work should follow Nature, as Nature follows God; to sin against Art, therefore, is indirectly to sin against God Himself The chief sinners in this respect are Usurers, who evade the law of work laid down by God at the beginning, and 'take another way' After parting with Rusticucci and his companions in the 'wheel,' the two pilgrims pursue their journey along the stone wall, and in a little the thunder of the cataract of Phlegethon as it plunges into the abyss of Fraud so deafens their ears that speech is almost impossible. Having reached the edge and called up the Guardian of the abyss, they see the Usurers sitting on the sand at the very verge of the precipice, and in order that Dante may carry away full knowledge of the Circle he is leaving, Virgil tells him to go and have a look at them, warning him, however, to let his conversation with them be brief.

It is obvious that in Dante's moral scheme Usurers,

the Violent against Art, are worse than either Blasphemers or Sodomites, the Violent against God and Nature. This is indicated by the position in which he has set them, they are at the very centre of the innermost Ring of the Circle, clustered round the mouth of the abyss that falls to the Circle of Fraud, and almost dropping into its depths. Crossing over to where they sit, Dante finds them enduring the punishments common to all the inhabitants of this Ring. the sandy desert over which they bend their heads is the symbol of their own barren lives, empty of all honest fruitful work, and the fire of Heaven's vengeance keeps their hands busy flinging it off

CANTOS
XVI 91-
XVII 78
—

Punishments :

Barrenness
and Fire

Not otherwise in summer do the dogs,
Now with the foot, now with the muzzle, when,
By fleas, or flies, or gadflies, they are bitten ¹

But they have also punishments peculiar to themselves. As in the old earthly days, so now they sit crouching over their money-bags, which are hung in scorn about their necks. On these bags their eyes feed hungrily, the ruling passion is strong, not in death alone but beyond it, and where the treasure is, there the heart is also. Or rather, where the treasure, alas, is *not*, for their money-bags are as empty now as once they were full, and even had they been overflowing, the constant rain of fire would have given their hands no leisure to indulge in the old delight of fingering the coins. In short, the passion lives on to torture, when all that created and gratified it has passed away

Passion for
Gold lives on

¹ *Inf* xvii 49-51 His comparison of them to dogs, and to dogs thus engaged, reveals Dante's contempt of Usurers comp lines 74, 75

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CANTOS
XVI. 91-
XVII. 78

Their in-
dividuality
lost

As was pointed out in a former chapter, we must regard it as another aspect of their punishment that these Usurers are unrecognizable, save indeed by the coats of arms painted on the pouches round their necks. 'Not one of them I knew,' says Dante, and this means more than that he has had no dealings with money-lenders. Obviously these coats of arms on which their eyes are feasting show that they desired to be known. Doubtless many of them were *nouveaux riches*, men who made fortunes by money-lending, and then set up for aristocrats with coats of arms. Dante had an unspeakable contempt for men whose only claim to be known was the assumption of armorial bearings, bought by the mammon of unrighteousness, and he refused to recognize them, although several belonged to well-known Florentine families. It is probable, however, that his thought goes deeper still. As we saw in Circle IV., the Avaricious were unrecognizable, the love and pursuit of money had blotted out their individuality.

'The undiscerning life which made them sordid
Now makes them unto all discernment dark' ¹

Probably the idea is the same here. Men who devote every power to the acquisition of wealth doom themselves thereby to obscurity and oblivion: no personal genius or memorable deed distinguishes them from the common herd. They may strive to rescue themselves from this fate by shields and devices and armorial bearings, but they strive in vain. no coat of arms can restore the individuality which their

¹ *Inf* VII 53, 54 See p 120

mercenary life has worn away, as the image is worn from the coin.

CANTOS
XVI. 91-
XVII. 78

Dante here relates an incident which it is difficult to explain otherwise than as an example of the inherent envy and vulgarity of men who have had no other object in life than to amass fortunes. Among a group of Florentines,¹ identified by the coats of arms on their money-bags, is a Paduan usurer whose armorial device was an azure sow on a white field Dante probably had a peculiar interest in setting this soul here. His name is Rinaldo, of the well-known family of the Scrovigni of Padua. In the year 1303 his son Enrico founded the Arena Chapel in that city, in expiation of his father's sins. 'The building of the Arena Chapel by the son, as a kind of atonement for the avarice of the father,' says Ruskin, 'is very characteristic of the period, in which the use of money for the building of churches was considered just as meritorious as its unjust accumulation was criminal. I have seen in a MS. Church-service of the thirteenth century, an illumination representing Church-Consecration . . . surrounded, for the purpose of contrast, by a grotesque, consisting of a picture of a miser's deathbed, a demon drawing his soul out of his mouth, while his attendants are searching in his chests for his treasures.'² In 1306 Dante's friend Giotto was engaged in covering the walls with the great series of frescoes which have made the Arena Chapel famous, and it is said that

Their Envy and
Vulgarity

Rinaldo degli
Scrovigni of
Padua.

¹ Napier (*Flor. History*, i 600) says that in Dante's day the ordinary rate of interest in Florence was twenty percent per annum, and that it sometimes rose to thirty and forty

² *Giotto and his Works in Padua*, p 3 n (Edition 1900)

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CANTOS
XVI. 91-
XVII. 78
—

Vitaliano del
Dente of
Padua

there is documentary evidence that Dante was in Padua in the same year. One can imagine the two friends smiling grimly at the idea of rescuing a usurer from Hell by the easy process of chapel-building. Dante, at all events, will not allow it to interfere with the course of Divine justice. chapel or no chapel, he is determined to set this man here in his own place. Now, even in Hell, he tells us, there still survived between this Paduan and his Florentine companions the old earthly rivalry and ambition of being the greatest in their business, the prince of money-lenders. This Rinaldo degli Scrovigni was evidently in the meantime the greatest usurer of the group, since he is the only one who speaks to Dante. He tells him, however, that soon a still greater is coming,—a certain Vitaliano del Dente, of Padua, who will sit on his left hand, the seat of honour in Hell. It is a consolation to him to know that this bad pre-eminence is reserved for one of his countrymen, instead of passing to his Florentine rivals. The latter, however, loudly dispute the claims of Padua, thundering in his ears that a greater than even Vitaliano is coming from Florence.

“Come the sovereign cavalier,
He who shall bring the satchel with three beaks!”¹

This ‘sovereign cavalier’ is identified by his coat of arms with Giovanni Bujamonte of Florence, the very prince of usurers in Dante’s day. As I under-

¹ *Inf* xvii 72, 73. *Becchi* means both *goats* and *beaks*, and both views have been taken. ‘Lord Vernon (*Inf* ii 433) gives a reproduction of the shield taken from the Archives of Florence. The *becchi* upon it are eagles’ beaks, two above and one underneath’ (Vernon’s *Readings*, ii 18 n.).

stand it, the meaning is that even in Hell the old ignoble rivalries and ambitions of men and cities survive; it is an additional pang to this Paduan that a greater usurer, and he a Florentine, would dethrone him from his bad pre-eminence. The only ambition which had ever moved these sordid souls had been that of making a larger fortune in business than their rivals, and this poor ambition so survives the shock of death that it adds a new bitterness to perdition itself to think that a greater money-maker, 'the sovereign cavalier' of usurers, would eclipse their purse-proud glory. In his baffled envy the Paduan gave his mouth a twist and thrust forth his tongue, 'like to an ox that licks his nose' a sign, perhaps, of the inherent coarseness and low-bred manners which, in Dante's view, were the natural accompaniments of mere money-grubbing, and which no wealth or coat of arms could permanently hide. Dante has seen and heard enough, without a word he leaves the wretched creatures and returns to his Guide. His whole treatment of the Usurers stands, and is meant to stand, in strong contrast to the marked reverence with which he had just met the Violent against Nature.

CANTOS
XVI. 81-
XVII. 78

Giovanni
Bujamonte of
Florence

He found Virgil already mounted 'on the haunch of the wild animal' which he had summoned from the abyss, but before we make the descent there are several points of interest and difficulty to be examined. There is, to begin with, the greatness of the descent, for that is symbolic of the vast moral fall from Violence to Fraud. This is indicated in three ways. First, by the wild, unbroken leap which Phlegethon, the River of Blood, takes over the pre-

Descent to the
Circle of
Fraud. Its
Greatness.

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CANTOS
XVI. 91-
XVII 78
—

cipice. Dante compares it to a river 'on the left slope of the Apennine,' which in its upper course is called Acquacheta, but at Forlì becomes the Montone—just as, after its fall here, Phlegethon is changed to Cocytus. At the gorge of the monastery of San Benedetto this river takes one unbroken flying leap, 'where,' says the poet, 'for a thousand there should be refuge' It is much disputed whether this 'where' refers to the gorge or to the monastery. If to the latter, as many of the earlier commentators thought, it is a sarcastic stroke at the way in which this Benedictine monastery, which had room for a thousand monks, had dwindled down to a mere handful. It seems more natural, however, to take it as referring to the gorge—the river taking the vast fall at one bound where there was space for a thousand leaps¹ It is obvious that Dante wishes to emphasize the greatness of the lapse from Violence to Fraud. The reason is, as elsewhere pointed out, that Violence is by comparison an open and honest sin. If it strikes at the foundations of society, as it undoubtedly does, yet it strikes with a species of frankness which gives society at least the chance of defending itself But Fraud in its very nature is an underhand sin, not unfrequently bearing the face and front of integrity—Satan transforming himself into an angel of light Giving no warning, it undermines the foundations of society when men least suspect it, and secretly dissolves the bonds of trust which are meant to draw mankind into a unity. Morally such a sin is a vast fall below even Violence,

¹ *Inf* xvi 94-105.

and the symbol of it is this one great leap of Phlegethon into the abyss of Fraud.

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XVII. 78
—

Another symbol is the absolute impossibility of making the descent on foot. Hitherto the travellers have managed to make their way down without aid. Twice, indeed, they were carried: once by Phlegyas in his boat across the Stygian Fen, and again by Nessus over the Ford of the River of Blood. These, however, were movements on the same level, not descents from Circle to Circle. Even at the great broken precipice of Violence on which the Minotaur lay stretched, they managed to scramble down unaided. Now, however, if they are to descend into the depths of Fraud, the monster of the pit must bear them down. In other words, Reason in the person of Virgil must summon the very Spirit of Fraud from his dark and secret hiding-place, must see him clearly in all his reptile deformity, and, having mastered him, compel him to reveal the secrets of his prison-house.

One other hint of the greatness of the lapse is given in the slow and gradual circlings with which the descent is made. Few men are so hardened that they plunge headlong into fraud as the river did, at one leap. It is in the nature of this sin that men almost invariably sink into it by windings so slow and gradients so gentle, that they are often unaware of the depth of their fall. Those who deceive others usually begin by deceiving themselves.

We turn now to the method of signalling to Geryon, the monster which guards the Eighth Circle, of which something has been said in a

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The Signal of
the Cord to
Geryon.

previous chapter. Dante tells us that when they arrived at the edge of the precipice he had round his waist a cord, which, at Virgil's request, he unloosed and handed to him, gathered up and coiled. Turning to the right, as a man naturally does in the act of throwing, Virgil cast it down the abyss. In response, through the thick murky air a 'marvellous figure' came swimming upwards, as a diver returns who has gone down to clear an anchor fouled on a rock or other entanglement at the bottom of the sea. It is obvious that Dante invests this cord with some symbolic significance. His words are

The Cord and
the Panther

I had a cord around about me girt,
And therewithal at one time I did think
To take the Panther with the painted skin ¹

This sets aside the idea that the cord was a mere signal used because nothing else was available: the thunder of the cataract would have drowned a call, the depth and darkness of the abyss made a gesture useless, and there was no loose stone to hurl down. All this is true, but it cannot exclude the symbolic meaning plainly indicated by Dante. We must also set aside the common interpretation which connects the cord with such a passage as *Isaiah* xi 5, 'Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins'. According to this view, the cord represents some virtue which is the opposite of Fraud, such as Uprightness, or Honesty, or Justice. But, as Scartazzini says, this would involve us in the entirely absurd consequence 'that

¹ *Inf.* xvi. 106 108.

THE SIGNAL OF THE CORD 255

in 1300, in the very year of his conversion, Dante divested himself wholly and entirely of virtue itself, for Virgil threw away the cord, nor does Dante ever speak of having retaken it, and girded himself with it anew.' The absurdity is heightened if we remember that this abandonment of virtue is said to be made at the very moment when Dante is about to enter the labyrinth of Fraud—surely the time of all others when he needed to have his 'loins girt about with truth'

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There is perhaps no interpretation which is entirely satisfactory, but undoubtedly that which seems to fit best into all the circumstances is the one which connects Dante with the Franciscan Order. The sign of the Order was a cord round the waist, from which its members were called 'cordeliers,' or cord-wearers. St. Francis himself used to call his body 'Brother Ass,' and regarded his cord as the halter by which he controlled it. In the *Paradiso* Dante speaks of the Franciscans as the family that were 'binding on the humble halter'¹. From a very early date there has existed a tradition that in his youth, after the death of Beatrice, he joined the Order. There can be no doubt as to the extraordinary reverence in which he held St. Francis. If Plumptre is to be believed, one of Giotto's paintings over the high altar at Assisi 'represents a figure coming to St. Francis in which we recognize the poet's unmistakable features'. In fine, in spite of modern scepticism, there seems to be ground for the belief held from Dante's own century that he joined the

Dante and the
Franciscan
Order

¹ *Par.* xi. 85-87

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Franciscan Order, but cast away its cord before completing his novitiate.

When we ask the reason for this casting away of the cord, it is not easy to answer. The only thing which seems certain is that it is somehow connected with a former hope that by means of this Franciscan cord he would 'take the Panther with the painted skin.' The obvious reference is to the first of the three beasts which obstructed his path as he climbed out of the dark and savage wood. In Canto i, he speaks of it as

A Panther light and swift exceedingly,
Which with a spotted skin was covered o'er

We have seen that this Panther has two leading interpretations—a moral and a political, and according as you take one or other, the casting away of the cord appears to connect itself with the Circles above or those below. Let us look at each in turn.

Moral
Symbolism

In its moral significance the Panther, as we saw, is the symbol of pleasures of the flesh. Now in the *Commedia* there are undoubtedly many hints that this species of temptation was not unknown to Dante, and if this is the reference here, his meaning is that at one period of his life, finding himself in danger from sensual passion, he joined the Franciscan Order in the hope that its ascetic rule would subdue his body to chastity. This hope, however, was disappointed; experience taught him that no monkish cord had power to purify the heart, and therefore at the bidding of Reason, in the person of Virgil, he cast it away. This view would bring the

act into intimate moral connection with the Circles which Dante is just about to leave. All through these he is more or less in contact with sins of the flesh, and therefore retains the cord which is a protection against them, now that he is about to descend to another order and quality of sin, he throws it away, as no longer necessary.

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If we adopt the political interpretation of the Panther, it rather connects the throwing away of the Franciscan cord with the Circle of Fraud to which the pilgrims are about to descend. The 'painted skin' of the beast represents then the political factions of Guelphs and Ghibellines, Blacks and Whites. It may have been Dante's hope at one time to subdue these factions by the cord, the Order of St. Francis,—just as at a later time Savonarola attempted a moral and political regeneration of Florence by means of the Dominican Order. If the poet ever entertained such a hope, it was quickly dispelled by the corruptions of the Franciscan Order itself. In the *Paradiso* he puts into the mouth of its General, St. Bonaventura, a lament over its moral degeneracy since its founder's death¹. On this view, the casting of the cord down to the Demon of Fraud may be Dante's symbolic way of declaring that this was the particular vice which was destroying the Order, and that therefore he had lost any hope he ever had of its accomplishing a political regeneration in Florence or Italy.

The former of these two interpretations is probably nearer to Dante's experience. He had learned

¹ *Par.* XII 112-126

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that no outward cord can of itself restrain the motions of sin. Nevertheless, it is plain that at this point in his pilgrimage he is very far from having reached that perfect inward freedom of which St. Paul speaks 'Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh' What has made this cord unnecessary is but a cord of another kind—the terror inspired by the punishments he has just witnessed. After seeing the awful issues of such sins and the terrible judgments of God upon them, no external cord of restraint is necessary Scartazzini, indeed, suggests that if Dante ever in his youth really contemplated renouncing the world and withdrawing into a cloister, he may in later life have regretted this casting away of the cord. He seems to think that this renunciation of the cloister, if it could be proved, would be found to be the key to many of the leading passages of the poem, as, for example, Dante's self-reproaches when he stands in the presence of Beatrice on the top of Mount Purgatory¹ It is difficult to believe that this suggestion is of much value Dante threw away the cord and made no attempt to take it again It is true, indeed, that in the *Convito* he praises Sir Lancelot and 'our most noble Italian Guido da Montefeltro' for devoting themselves in their old age to the religious life, instead of running presumptuously into the port of death with sails full set. The context shows, however, that the religious life does not necessarily mean the cloister² At all events, Dante never

¹ *Companion to Dante*, p 200

² *Conv* iv 28 'And it is not possible to excuse any one [from the religious life] because of the bond of matrimony, which holds good in

sought to resume the cord which he here threw off. Once again, indeed, he did gird himself, but it is with a rush, whose meek bending before the waves is the natural symbol of humility under the chastisement of the waters of God's redeeming discipline.¹ And he thus girds himself with the humility of penitence, because he is about to climb the Mount of Liberty, to gain that inner freedom of the purified soul which needs no cords of external restraint, but is a law unto itself. This inner freedom is reached on the top of the Mount of Purification, where Virgil says to Dante

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—

'Free, upright, and healthy is thy will,
And error were it not to do its prompting,
Thee o'er thyself I therefore crown and mitre'²

'Crown and mitre,' king and priest, final authority over himself in things temporal and spiritual alike. It is impossible to imagine a man who had this lofty ideal of inner freedom ever seriously regretting the casting away of any cord of external restraint,—he could only regard it as a necessary step to the attainment of the 'royal law' of liberty

old age, because not he alone turns to religion who makes himself in habit and life like St Benedict and St Augustine and St Francis and St Dominic, but also it is possible to turn to a good and true religion whilst remaining in matrimony, for God wishes nothing religious of us but the heart. And therefore St Paul says to the Romans "He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God."

¹ *Purg.* 1 94 105

² *Purg.* xxvii 140 142

CHAPTER XVI

CIRCLE VIII —MALEBOLGE THE FRAUDULENT

Bolgia I. Betrayers of Women

Bolgia II Flatterers

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XVIII

Geryon
Guardian and
Symbol of the
Circle of
Fraud

IN answer to the signal of the cord, Geryon, the Guardian of the Eighth Circle, came swimming up through the thick air of the abyss like a diver from the bottom of the sea—a form so marvellous that Dante hesitates to describe it, lest he should not be believed. In heathen mythology Geryon is a monster of three heads and bodies, according to Virgil, Æneas saw ‘the three-bodied shade’ sitting in the mouth of Hades in company with Gorgons, Harpies, and other monsters¹. He is sometimes identified with a King of the Balearic Isles, and it was one of the labours of Hercules to drive away his oxen. There is nothing in the classical myths which quite explains why Dante makes Geryon the personification of Fraud, but in the Middle Ages there seems to have existed a legend that his custom was to invite strangers into his house and then rob and slay them. Dante, while discarding the three-bodied form of mythology, preserves the triplicity of the monster by uniting in

¹ *Æn* vi 289

him man, brute, and reptile, each of which is symbolic of some aspect of Fraud.

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'The face was as the face of a just man,
Its semblance outwardly was so benign'¹

Man, Brute,
and Reptile.

For perfect fraud nothing is so useful as this look of benignant justice—the open countenance, the frank and honest eye, the brow on which integrity sits. It disarms suspicion and creates trust, until the paws behind have time to clutch and the scorpion tail to sting. The idea of the just face is much the same as that indicated by the direction in which the travellers have to turn to reach the monster—to the right, one of the few times in Hell. This may certainly mean, as it is usually understood, that in our encounters with Fraud our only safety lies in keeping to the right,—the path of rectitude, and the 'ten steps' which they take in this direction to meet the monster may be symbolic of the ten commandments. This would not exclude the further idea that it was not by accident Geryon settled to their right on the margin of the chasm: the moral suggestion is that the Spirit of Fraud disarms suspicion by approaching those it hopes to make its victims on the side of righteousness.

Beneath the human head were 'two paws, hairy unto the armpits'—obvious symbols of the brute violence and cruelty which lurk behind the just benignant face, ready to seize their victim. Lower still, behind the brute lies the reptile, a serpent's tail with the sting of a scorpion—emblem of the

¹ *Inf* xviii 10, 11

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evil wisdom of the serpent, the low crawling cunning with which Fraud entangles its victims, and the deadly poison with which it strikes them from behind. It is to be noticed, too, that the monster keeps his serpent-tail as far as possible out of sight.

‘And that uncleanly image of Fraud
Came up and thrust ashore its head and bust,
But on the border did not drag its tail ’¹

This it prudently kept unseen, ‘quivering in the void’ below. The general conception is taken partly from the locusts of the Apocalypse ‘Their faces were as the faces of men And they had hair as the hair of women And they had tails like unto scorpions, and they had stings in their tails.’² In mediæval art, the Satan who tempted Eve is frequently represented as a serpent with a human face ‘The whole figure,’ says Hettinger, ‘is typical of the beginning, the middle, and the end of fraud. For the impostor seeks to captivate his victim by his gracious aspect, whilst he winds his coils around him, and at last darts out the fatal sting.’ Nor does this complete the symbolism

‘The back, and breast, and both the sides it had
Depicted o’er with knots and little shields
With colours more, groundwork and broidery,
Never in cloth did Tartars make nor Turks,
Nor were such tissues by Arachne laid ’³

The reference to Arachne, the Lydian maiden whom Athene changed into a spider, may give the clue to the idea. As a spider weaves its web to entangle its

¹ *Inf* xvii. 7-9

² *Rev.* ix 7, 8, 10

³ *Inf* xvii 14 18

prey, so Fraud weaves its network of knots and nooses to ensnare its victims. 'The varied colours, not unlike the pattern of a snake's skin, help out the symbolism of subtle and varied fraud.' 'The "small bucklers" represent the subterfuges under which fraud *shields* itself' so ready to strike others with its scorpion tail, it takes care to defend itself, back, and breast, and sides

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When Dante returned from viewing the Usurers The Descent to Circle VIII where they sat crouching upon the sand, he found Virgil already mounted on the back of the 'wild animal,' ready for the descent. At the command to mount, he fell into trembling like a man in ague. His Guide set him in front, so that he himself might be between him and the scorpion tail behind. The idea is that as Fraud is 'man's peculiar vice,' inasmuch as it is the perversion to deceit of man's peculiar gift of reason, nothing but reason can protect a man from its poison. Even then, although Virgil embraced and sustained him, Dante was far from being reassured. When the monster, wheeling with his burden, floated free, 'and with his paws drew to himself the air,' the poet was seized with an almost intolerable terror. For a time everything vanished from his sight save the wild beast, only a wind on his face from below told him he was descending, so slow and gradual were the downward circlings; on his right the whirlpool of Phlegethon made a horrible roaring, and when at last, hearing the sound of lamentations, he ventured to look down, he saw the glare of fires, and knew that he was circling round and round, hovering over and gradually approaching

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—

'great evils,' which made him cower back in fear and trembling. It has been well compared to what an aeronaut might see if his balloon descended at night over the foundries, furnaces, and ironworks of the Black Country of Staffordshire. When Geryon had made his last circuit he set them down at the rugged base of the precipice, and immediately 'vanished like an arrow from the string.' Dante significantly compares him to a falcon which, 'without seeing either lure or bird,' slowly descends in a hundred weary circlings and alights far from his master 'sullen and disdainful.' It was in the same sullen and indignant temper that Geryon came down. Like the falcon, he had seen neither lure nor bird. The 'new sign' of the cord doubtless raised hopes of securing some great prey, a Franciscan friar at least, and he is indignant and sullen that he has had the long and weary flight for nothing. To defraud others is pleasant work, to be himself defrauded is matter for indignant anger.

Malebolge

We are now in Circle VIII, the prison of the Fraudulent, those who broke 'that love which Nature makes,' the general bond of humanity. The description of it occupies no fewer than thirteen Cantos out of the thirty-four, the proportion probably representing the prevalence of the sin

'Behold the wild beast with the pointed tail,
That passes mountains and breaks thro' walls and weapons,
Behold him who all the world pollutes'¹

It is necessary to have the construction of this Circle

¹ *Inf* xvii 1-3

clearly before our minds. Dante calls it Malebolge, which means Evil-pouches. One is tempted to find in this use of the word *pouches* a hint of that love of money which is the root of so many species of Fraud. these men who were so eager on earth filling their pockets, are here pocketed themselves. This very play on words is made by Dante a little further down. In the third Bolgia or Pouch, a Pope who is there for Simony confesses that in his eagerness to advance the family to which he belonged, 'wealth above, and here myself, I pocketed'¹ The name Evil-pouches, therefore, may have more significance than is generally supposed these souls were pocketing more than money when they pursued their careers of fraud on earth. Dante compares the Circle to a central castle ringed round with ten concentric moats or fosses, connected with one another by a system of bridges. The centre, however, is not a castle rising from the ground, but an immense well sunk into it, the bottom of which, as we shall see, is the frozen Lake of Cocytus, which forms the Ninth Circle. To this central well the bridges run like the spokes of a wheel to the nave, and the moats lie one below another like the tiers of an amphitheatre. The whole place is of rugged iron-coloured stone—the dykes which separate the moats from each other, the bridges which span them, and the vast circular precipice which shuts all in. Both material and construction are symbolic. 'The violent who sin openly are placed in a wide plain, whilst the fraudulent are hidden in deep clefts, the more

¹ *Inf* xix 72.

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—

crafty the deceit the deeper the fosse. As a more hardened heart is required for fraud than for violence, these holes are hewn in rock hard as iron.¹ Dante gives us a few measurements from which attempts have been made to calculate the dimensions of the whole. The ninth Bolgia is twenty-two miles in circumference, and the tenth is eleven round, and half a mile across at the bottom 'Assuming, as seems likely, that the same proportions are maintained throughout Malebolge, we get the following measurements.—circumference (as given by Dante) of Bolgia 10 eleven miles, and of Bolgia 9 twenty-two miles, hence that of Bolgia 8 would be thirty-three miles, that of Bolgia 7 forty-four, of Bolgia 6 fifty-five, of Bolgia 5 sixty-six, of Bolgia 4 seventy-seven, of Bolgia 3 eighty-eight, of Bolgia 2 ninety-nine, of Bolgia 1 a hundred and ten, this would give the diameter of Malebolge at its upper rim, where it is widest, as thirty-five miles.² It is questionable whether such calculations add anything to our understanding of the poem, unless perhaps in helping us to realize the extent to which, in Dante's view, some forms of Fraud sink and narrow the soul much more than others. The Fraud which springs from Sensuality in the first Bolgia, bad as it is, leaves the soul a circle ten times as great as the Fraud of Falsification in the last. In the order of the ten Moats, it is extremely difficult to discover any principle of classification whatever. They stand as follows.

¹ Hettinger, p. 129

² Toynbee's *Dante Dictionary*, 'Malebolge', *Inf.* xliix 9, xxx 86

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Bolgia	I. Betrayers of Women — Panders and Seducers.	CANTOS XVII. 79- XVIII
„	II. Flatterers	—
„	III. Simoniacs — Traffickers in Offices of the Church	The Ten Classes of the Fraudulent
„	IV Diviners.	
„	V Barrators — Traffickers in Offices of the State.	
„	VI. Hypocrites.	
„	VII. Thieves.	
„	VIII Evil Counsellors	
„	IX Schismatics—Sowers of Discord	
„	X Falsifiers.	

We cannot for a moment doubt that Dante, in thus arranging them, had some quite definite principle of classification in his mind, but it is far from easy to discover it—whether the degree in which reason is perverted, or the measure in which they undermine society, or, more generally, the amount and quality of the craftiness which they involve. In any case, the general conception remains the descent from Moat to Moat represents the power of various forms of Fraud to sink the man to a lower perdition, and the lessening of each Moat, their power to narrow down the soul to a smaller and smaller circle of existence

It was on the pathway skirting the base of the great precipice, and immediately above the first of these Moats, that Geryon set the travellers down. Virgil straightway turned to the left. On their right at the bottom of the fosse they saw two streams of naked souls flowing in opposite direc-

Bolgia I —
Panders and
Seducers

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—

tions, so that the nearer faced them, while the farther moved like themselves toward the left, 'but with greater steps.' The sight reminded Dante of the year of the first Jubilee, 1300, when it is said upwards of two million pilgrims visited Rome. So vast were the throngs that special arrangements had to be made for passing the people safely over the bridge of St. Angelo, which crosses the Tiber at the castle of the same name—one stream going toward St. Peter's, the other toward 'the mount,' by which probably the Capitol is meant. So flowed this double tide of naked souls, scourged on by horned demons

' Ah me! how they did make them lift their legs
At the first blows! and sooth not any one
The second waited for, nor for the third ' ¹

The nearer stream consisted of Panders, men who betrayed women to the passions of others, the farther, of Seducers, who betrayed them to their own. Dante indicates their relative guilt by the directions in which they move: the Seducers march leftwards, the Panders to the right. Among the latter he recognizes one whom he had evidently known on earth, and with Virgil's leave he turns back to speak with him. The miserable wretch lowers his face in shame to escape recognition, the first soul in Hell that has the grace to be ashamed. Dante, however, refuses to let him off

'Thou that upon the ground thine eye dost cast,
If the features which thou wearest be not false,
Thou art Venedico Caccianimico,
But what doth bring thee to such pungent sauces?' ²

Venedico
Caccianimico
of Bologna.

¹ *Inf.* xviii. 37-39

² *Inf.* xviii. 48-51.

The word here translated 'sauces' is *salse*, and the question might mean nothing more than our colloquial, 'How did you come to such a pickle as this?' But there seems to be a play on the word, which this sinner would only too well understand. He was a well-known nobleman of Bologna, and near his native city there was a ravine called the *Salse* where the bodies of criminals were thrown, and where, according to some commentators, panders were flogged. Benvenuto da Imola, who was the first public lecturer on Dante in the University of Bologna, says he used to hear boys of that city fling at each other the taunt, 'Your father was thrown into *Le Salse*!' It must have cut the proud Bolognese nobleman to the quick to hear a name which he held in such contempt on earth applied to the place of his eternal punishment. Seeing it was vain to hide himself, he unwillingly tells his 'shameless story,' of which several versions seem to have been current. He confesses that it was he who had betrayed his sister, 'the beautiful Ghisola,'¹ to 'the Marquis'—one of the Marquises of Este, it is uncertain which. He excuses himself by declaring that he is not the only Bolognese who weeps here. there were more of them in this Moat than the entire population of Bologna then alive.² He appeals to Dante's own knowledge of the avarice of his countrymen, which he declares to be the root

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XVIII
—

¹ Toynbee says her name was 'Ghisolabella,' one word, not, as is generally assumed, 'Ghisola bella,' beautiful Ghisola.

² *Inf.* xviii 59-61. Venedico says there are more Bolognese in this Moat than are taught to say *sipa* between the Savena and Reno, the two rivers between which Bologna lies. *Sipa* is the Bolognese equivalent for *st*.

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of this shameful sin. Probably Dante, who had been a student in Bologna, wrote this passage from his own personal knowledge of the prevailing vices of the city. At this point one of the demons cut short Venedico's confession with a stroke of his lash, crying.

‘Get thee gone,

Pander, there are no women here for coming’

Rejoining his Guide, after a few steps they came to a ridge of rock which ran out from the base of the precipice and formed a bridge across the first Moat. Mounting this and turning to the right, Virgil bids Dante pause on the arch of the bridge to see the other stream of souls, whose backs only had been visible, because they had been walking in the same leftward direction as themselves. They are the souls of Seducers. Among them Virgil points out Jason, the great classical example of the false lovers of antiquity. He is here for two crimes, the betrayal of the Lemnian maiden, ‘the young Hypsipyle,’ and the desertion of his wife Medea for Creusa. Even the pain and shame of his punishment cannot destroy the courage and kingly bearing of the man who dared the great adventure of the Golden Fleece, he neither weeps nor flinches.

Jason

‘Look at that great one who is coming,
And for his pain seems not to shed a tear
Still what a royal aspect he retains!’¹

He reminds us of Farinata, the great Ghibelline chief, who lifted himself breast-high from his burning tomb, as if even ‘Hell he held in great disdain’

¹ *Inf.* xviii. 83-85

That is the narrative; let us now look more carefully at the punishment of this sin. The form of it is taken from *Leviticus* xix 20, where, in the Vulgate, scourging is the penalty of seduction. The meaning, however, will be more adequately reached if we compare the sin before us here with the other forms of Sensuality which we have already met. The first, in Circle II, is what we may call *natural* Sensuality—the mere non-control and excess of a natural appetite. The second is *unnatural* Sensuality—a positive violation of Nature, and therefore placed much lower down, in Circle VII. The point of importance is that neither of these involves Fraud, whereas precisely this is the distinguishing mark of the sinners of this Moat: their Sensuality is not frank and open, but mean and treacherous. They have all betrayed trust and innocence for the gratification of their own or others' passions. Now the punishment common to all three forms of Sensuality is a constant and tormenting restlessness—the torture of their own passions which allows them no repose. But there is a great and significant difference in the ministers of vengeance employed. In the case of the natural Sensualists a natural force is used: they are 'imprisoned in the viewless winds, and blown with restless violence'. The Sensualists who have violated Nature are punished by a supernatural pain, a fire direct from the Heaven they have defied. But when Sensuality goes hand-in-hand with Fraud, the punishment is, so to speak, *infra-natural*, it is committed to demons: in other words, it becomes then a crime of devils, and only devils

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—
punishment

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—
Demon-
tormentors

can adequately requite it. Here for the first time diabolic beings appear as ministers of justice, and this is no accident. Take, for example, the well-known portrait of Dante by Domenico di Michelino in the Cathedral of Florence. On the poet's right hand, the painter shows us the Gate of Hell, with the Neutrals inside, driven on by demons. This involves a total misunderstanding of Dante's moral scheme. The devils do not appear in the Inferno until we come to diabolic sins: they would scorn to waste their time on these neutral cowards. Even when we meet demons at the gate of Dis, it is for the defence of the City: they are there, not as tormentors of the lost souls within. In short, comparing the three forms of Sensuality, Dante wishes us to understand that the least guilty species of it is natural and human; lower down it becomes an unnatural mingling of the human and the brute, as in the case of the Minotaur, while in its basest form it is a monstrous union of the human, the brute, and the demonic. This takes place when Fraud enters in. Its symbol is Geryon: the face of a man, the paws of a brute, and the tail of the old serpent, the devil. The demons, therefore, with the horns on their heads which were the recognized symbol of adultery, are an essential element of both the sin and its punishment. The man who can betray innocence and trust, is, in Dante's regard, a kind of demon, and has, in the diabolic state of his own passions, a fierce and fiendish unrest which passes the bounds of the human, returning him, blow for blow, all the shame and ruin which he inflicted on others.

Leaving the first bridge, Dante and Virgil ascend the second. The Moat beneath is so deep that in order to see it at all they have to stand on the very top of the arch—an indication of the deep and subtle nature of the sin of Flattery which is here punished. Gazing down into the darkness, they see the souls of Flatterers half-smothered in loathsome filth. One wretch has his head so covered with the foulness that it is not clear whether he is clerk or layman, but Dante recognizes him as one whom he had seen before 'with his hair dry.' It is Alessio Intermineli (or Interminelli) of Lucca, of whom we know nothing but that he belonged to the party of the Whites, and that a document of 1295 mentions him as alive in that year. The older commentators say that he would besmear even the lowest menials with flattery. Virgil points out a soul from the ancient world, Thais, once a beautiful courtesan, but now an 'uncleanly and dishevelled drab,' scratching herself with filthy nails and restlessly standing and crouching by turns. In reality she is only a fictitious character in Terence's *Eunuchus*. Dante doubtless got the reference from Cicero's *De Amicitia*, where it is given as an example of flattery. At first glance, it seems a very innocent example. Her lover had sent her the present of a slave, and when he asked, 'Have I great thanks from thee?' she replied, 'Nay, marvellous!' According to Dante, following Cicero, it is in this exaggeration of gratitude that her flattery consisted. It seems a small thing, but doubtless Dante had specially before his mind 'the strange woman' of

CANTOS
XVII 79-
XVIII
Bolgia II —
Flatterers

CANTOS
XVII. 79-
XVIII

Proverbs—‘the stranger which flattereth with her words’

‘With her much fair speech she causeth him to yield,
With the flattering of her lips she forceth him away
For the lips of a strange woman drop honey,
And her mouth is smother than oil
But her latter end is bitter as wormwood,
Sharp as a two-edged sword.
Her feet go down to death,
Her steps take hold on hell’

It is to be noticed that this is the only place in which Dante describes two sins in the same Canto, and probably this is not accidental ‘Pandering and Flattery,’ as Vernon says, ‘are two species of Fraud which have a good deal of affinity for one another Every Pander is a Flatterer, though indeed every Flatterer need not necessarily be a Pander’¹

Punishment—
The Canal of
Filth

The punishment is almost too vile for refined ears. From the loathsome canal an exhalation rose and settled on the margin in a mouldy scum which ‘waged war with eyes and nostrils’ In this foul element, the wretched souls are beating themselves with their hands and ‘snorting with their muzzles’ like dogs The use of the word ‘muzzles’ is intentional these Fatterers are dogs which were in the habit of licking every foul thing, the worst sins and vices of the men on whom they fawned, and now they have such vileness to their hearts’ content As, dog-like, they fawned and lived on filth here, their

¹ Vernon’s *Readings*, II 58

eternal doom is to be plunged in that which was on
earth their life and element ¹

CANTOS
XVII 79-
XVIII

¹ According to Aquinas, Flattery is a mortal sin, because it is contrary to charity in three ways (1) 'In virtue of the *matter* praised, when one praises another's sin'—thus encouraging him in evil, (2) 'In virtue of the *intention* of him who praises, when one flatters another in order fraudulently to hurt him either in body or in soul', (3) 'In virtue of the *occasion* given, when the flatterer's praise becomes to the other an occasion of sin, even beside the intention of the flatterer' (*Summa*, II II q cxv a 2)

CHAPTER XVII

CIRCLE VIII.—MALEBOLGE . THE FRAUDULENT

Bolgia III. Simoniacs

CANTO XIX TURNING away from the Moat of the Flatterers,
Bolgia III.— Dante and his Guide find themselves on the rocky
Simoniacs ridge which overlooks the third valley of this Circle.
The first words of the Canto tell us what sin is here
punished .

Simon Magus O Simon Magus ! O wretched followers !
Because the things of God, which ought to be
The brides of holiness, and ye rapacious
For silver and for gold do prostitute,
Now it behoves for you the trumpet sound, —

the trumpet, namely, of his exposure of them in this Canto It is the sin of Simony, which takes its name from Simon Magus in the *Acts of the Apostles*, who thought he could buy from St. Peter the power of imparting the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands¹ It includes every form of trafficking in holy things, and in particular the ordination of unworthy men to holy offices 'for value received.' These holy things ought to be, in Dante's phrase, 'the brides of holiness,' that is, bestowed freely and lawfully on good and worthy men; whereas Simoniacs 'prostitute' them by driving a vile trade

¹ *Acts* viii. 14 24

in them with whoever will pay the price. This CANTO XIX
 price, of course, is not necessarily cash, it may be
 kinship, friendship, favouritism, support, services
 rendered or expected. According to Aquinas, there
 are three reasons why spiritual things are not fit
 subjects of barter. 'First, because a spiritual thing
 cannot have its equivalent in any earthly price. . .
 Secondly, because that cannot be due matter of sale,
 of which the seller is not the owner. . . . Thirdly,
 because selling is inconsistent with the origin of
 spiritual things, which proceed from the gratuitous
 will of God '¹ As we shall see, Simony corresponds
 to Barratry, the sin punished in the fifth Moat.
 Simony is trafficking in offices of the Church, Bar-
 ratry in offices of the State

Looking down from the rocky bridge, Dante sees The Wells in
the Rock
 that the 'livid stone' of which the valley below is
 made is perforated with small circular openings
 like wells. They are very numerous, filling the
 bottom and both sides, in indication of the preval-
 ence of the sin. For size he compares them to the
 little stone-pulpits in 'my beautiful St John'—the
 Baptistery at Florence—in which the priests stood
 when administering baptism. In Dante's day the
 baptismal font seems to have consisted of a central
 cistern for water, surrounded at a little distance by
 a low wall or parapet, at the corners of which were
 little circular openings, inside of which stood the
 officiating priests. It is said that this arrangement
 was necessary because, since baptisms took place
 only on certain special days, there was usually a

¹ *Summa*, ii. ii. q. c. a. 1

CANTO XIX — crowd, and these little stone-pulpits (if we may call them so) kept the priests from being jostled as they performed their sacred office.¹ It is to these, then, that Dante compares the perforations in this valley of rock. Out of each opening protruded a pair of legs from the calf, all writhing in agony, in a convulsive effort to shake off flames of fire which played on the upturned soles from heel to toe. Dante wishes to know the name of one sinner in particular, whose legs are writhing more wildly than the rest, and on whose feet 'a redder flame is sucking', and Virgil carries him down into the valley that he may learn from the sufferer himself. On reaching the opening, Dante adjures the wretched soul to speak, if speak he can, and receives the wholly unexpected reply

Pope
Nicholas III

'Dost thou stand there already,
Dost thou stand there already, Boniface?
By several years the writing lied to me
Art thou so quickly sated with that wealth
For which thou didst not fear to take by guile
The beautiful Lady, and then make ruin of her?'²

Dante stood in surprise at this reply, and Virgil tells him to say he is not the man he took him for. His head buried in the rock, and therefore unable to see the poet, the tortured spirit had mistaken him for Pope Boniface VIII, and was astonished to find him here sooner by several years than his vision of the future had led him to expect. He then informs

Pope
Boniface VIII

¹ So Vernon, *Readings*, ii 72-74. 'The Baptismal Font with the holes made for the baptizing priests to stand in, no longer exists (at Florence), having been destroyed in 1576. There are, however, two similar fonts still in existence, one at Pisa, the other at Pistoja. That at Pisa is thought to have a close resemblance to the one formerly in use at Florence.'

² *Inf.* xix 52-57

Dante that he had been Pope Nicholas III., 'son of CANTO XIX
the She-bear,' as he calls himself, in allusion to his
family name of Orsini. He tells his sin and its doom
with a touch of grim humour. So eager had he
been to 'advance the cubs'—that is, of course, his
kindred the Orsini—that he had, as it were, at a
single stroke pocketed wealth on earth, and *himself*
here in this *bolgia* or pouch of Hell. The reference
is to the notorious nepotism of this Pope Villani,
who was a Guelph, and therefore not likely to ex-
aggerate the sins of the Papacy, says Nicholas 'was
among the first, if not the first, of the Popes in
whose court simony was openly practised on behalf
of his kindred, by the which thing he increased them
much in possessions, and in castles, and in treasure
beyond all the Romans, during the short time that
he lived. This Pope made seven Roman cardinals,
whereof the most part were his kinsfolk'¹ It was
said sarcastically that 'he erected a Zion in his own
kith and kin', indeed, it was believed that his true
ambition was, as Milman says, to make the Empire
hereditary in his house²

Nicholas proceeds to explain that on the arrival
of a new sinner for this opening, he himself would
be thrust down completely into the hole, and the
newcomer set head downwards above him just
as beneath him now there ran a long line of his
predecessors, crushed one by one into the fissure
which penetrated far into the rock—a grim in-
fernal mockery of the Apostolic Succession which
these men had claimed. Nicholas foretells the

¹ Villani, vii. 54

² Latin Christianity, vi. 416, 417

CANTO XIX — speedy coming of two other Popes. The first is Boniface VIII., for whom he had mistaken the poet. We have already seen that Dante regarded this Pope as his chief enemy, but it would be doing him an injustice to think that his hatred of him was a mere personal thing. He believed that Boniface had taken 'the beautiful Lady,' the Church, by guile, referring to his having induced Celestine V to resign in order to wear 'the Great Mantle' himself, and that this first fraud was followed up by acts of simony which had brought the Church to ruin. He never loses a chance of denouncing him, he calls him 'the prince of the new Pharisees,' and says that in Paradise when St Peter spoke of him, all Heaven flushed red with shame and indignation.¹ This part of the poem was written after the death of Boniface in 1303, as the reference to his successor plainly shows, but the ideal date of the *Commedia* being 1300, Dante throws his doom into the form of a prophecy. But even Boniface is not the worst of Simoniacs. Soon, Nicholas declares, a greater sinner would come to crush him in his turn down into the rocky fissure

Pope
Clement V

'For after him shall come of fouler deeds
From towards the west a Pastor without law,
Such as befits to cover him and me'²

¹ *Inf* xxvii 85, *Par* xxvii 19-38. In the latter passage, Peter declares that the Papacy is vacant, since it is filled only by usurpation.

'He who usurpeth upon earth my place,
My place, my place, which vacant is
Before the presence of the Son of God.'

For a defence of Nicholas, Celestine V, and Boniface, from the R C point of view, see Hettinger's *Dante's Divine Commedia*, Preface xi xiv, also p 353, where Dante is accused of personal resentment against Boniface as 'the destroyer of his life's happiness'.

² *Inf* xix 82-84

This is Clement v., a mere tool of Philip the Fair of CANTO XIX France. Nicholas compares him to Jason, of whom we read in Maccabees that he bought the High Priesthood from Antiochus Epiphanes, and used it to corrupt Israel to Greek manners.¹ 'Every act of his must have appeared to Dante iniquitous and disastrous. He transferred the Papacy from Rome to Avignon, and so began the seventy years of Babylonian exile, made himself the servile instrument of Philip the Fair in the suppression of the Knights Templars, and was besides conspicuous for simony, nepotism, and personal profligacy.' In Dante's judgment, his one great act of simony consisted in selling the Papacy to Philip by making himself his creature and tool.²

At this point the poet, unable longer to restrain his indignation, breaks out into prophetic denunciations of this Papal avarice which

Denunciation
of Simoniacal
Popes

'afflicts the world,

Trampling the good, and lifting the depraved'

What great price, he asks Nicholas, beyond 'Follow me,' did Christ demand from Peter before he gave him the keys? What gold or silver did Peter and the rest demand of Matthias when they chose him by lot to the office forfeited by Judas? He boldly

¹ 2 Macc iv 7 19.

² Plumtree (*Dante* I cxiii) gives this interesting note about the Cathedral of which he was Dean 'Our records at Wells Cathedral furnish some indication of the way in which Clement enriched himself I find the Dean and Chapter, as collectors of a tithe for six years, ordered by Pope Clement for the recovery of the Holy Land, giving a receipt for £200 paid to them for that purpose (*Report on MSS of Wells*, p 74, 1885) This was, apparently, the crusade contemplated by Henry VII That crusade never came off, but the money from Wells, and, we may believe, from all parts of Europe, found its way to the Papal coffers (comp Milman, *Latin Christianity*, vii 389)'

CANTO XIX compares the Papacy, as represented by men like Nicholas, Boniface, and Clement, to 'the scarlet woman' of the Apocalypse

**The Scarlet
Woman**

'The Evangelist you Pastors had in mind
When she who has her seat upon the waters
To fornicate with kings by him was seen,
The same who with the seven heads was born,
And from the ten horns had her power,
So long as virtue to her spouse was pleasing'¹

At first reading we might imagine that Dante has made the curious mistake of transferring the seven heads and ten horns from the beast on which she sits in the Apocalypse, to the woman herself, but that Dante of all men should commit so glaring a blunder is inconceivable. The transference was made deliberately. It is almost certain that the seven heads with which the Church was born are the seven virtues, four cardinal and three theological, and that the ten horns of her power are the ten commandments. These belong to her in her original ideal purity, of which Dante is here speaking, and when she falls from that ideal purity with which she was born, they become transformed into their opposite vices and appear, as in the Apocalypse, as the heads and horns of the beast on which she sits. St. John is speaking of her in her fallen state, Dante in her original purity. So long as 'her spouse,' the Pope, loved virtue, the seven virtues and the ten commandments were her strength.

**The 'Donation
of Constantine'**

Dante was no believer in ecclesiastical endowments. The beginning of this corruption of the

¹ *Inf* XIX 106-111, *Rev* XVII

Papacy which sank so many prelates to this Moat of CANTO XIX
Simony, he traces to the 'Donation of Constantine'.

'Ah Constantine! of how much ill was mother,
Not thy conversion, but that marriage-dower
Which the first wealthy Father took from thee'¹

The reference is to the extraordinary mediæval forgery which pretended that Constantine, on his conversion to Christianity, had made a gift of the Western Empire to Pope Sylvester and his successors. Dante, of course, did not regard it as a forgery, but he argued boldly that such a donation is beyond the power of the Emperor to give, and equally beyond the power of the Pope to receive. 'The Church,' he says in the *De Monarchia*, 'was altogether unqualified to receive temporal things, for there is an express command forbidding her to do so, which Matthew gives thus "Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses." For though we find in Luke a relaxation of the command in certain matters, yet I have not anywhere been able to find that the Church after that prohibition had licence given her to possess gold and silver. If therefore the Church was unable to receive temporal power, even granting that Constantine was able to give it, yet the gift was impossible, for the receiver was disqualified. It is therefore plain that neither could the Church receive in the way of possession, nor could Constantine give in the way of alienation, though it is true that the Emperor, as protector of the Church,

¹ *Inf* xix 115 117.

CANTO XIX could allot to the Church a patrimony and other things, if he did not impair his supreme lordship, the unity of which does not allow division. And the Vicar of God could receive such things, not to possess them, but as a steward to dispense the fruits of them to the poor of Christ, on behalf of the Church, as we know the Apostles did '¹ 'Let these possessions,' he says, 'go back to whence they came.' So strong is his conviction that the 'Donation' was a curse to Italy that he could wish Constantine had never been born 'Oh happy people, oh Ausonia, how glorious hadst thou been, if either he, that weakener of thine empire, had never been born, or if his own pious intention had never deceived him '²

The poet's denunciations of the Church have very different effects on his two hearers While the guilty Pope writhed his burning feet more violently—whether from anger or conscience Dante cannot say—Virgil, well pleased, clasped him in his arms and bore him safely to the arch of the next bridge.

Here tenderly he laid his burden down,
Tenderly for the crag uneven and steep,
That would have been hard passage to the goats '³

This must have some symbolic meaning, for Virgil's pleasure and displeasure are always significant Here the significance is peculiar. As a rule, Virgil represents Reason; and taking this view the meaning is that Dante's denunciations of this sin do not overshoot the mark—Reason itself approves of such

¹ *De Mon* iii 10

² *De Mon* ii 13 Ausonia is the ancient name for Campania, but is used for all Italy Comp *Par* viii 61 63

³ *Inf* xix, 130 132.

indignation. But at this particular point Dante, CANTO XIX
 who delights in the manifoldness of his symbolism,
 seems to fall back on another idea of Virgil—as the
 representative of the Empire in contradistinction to
 the Church. In short, in this Moat the two powers
 confront each other—the spiritual authority in the
 person of Nicholas, and the imperial as symbolized
 in Virgil, the poet of the founding of the Empire.
 Now Dante was an Imperialist, and he indicates in
 this passage the source of his boldness in thus
 attacking the Papacy. It is because he feels himself
 protected by the Emperor, Virgil, the representative
 of the imperial authority, carries him down into this
 ‘tomb’ of corrupt churchmen who grasped eagerly
 at temporal power and wealth, listens with ‘con-
 tented lip’ to his denunciations of them, and ten-
 derly carries him back to a place of safety

Before passing to the punishment of this sin, we
 should remark the double feeling which Dante bears
 towards the Papacy reverence for the office, and
 indignation against many holders of it The indig-
 nation breaks out in passage after passage, Popes,
 Cardinals, clerks, are among the Avaricious, the
 Heretics, the Sodomites, and many other classes of
 sinners, nevertheless he refuses to confound the
 office itself with the unworthy men who may have
 held it He devoutly regarded the Pope as the
 Divinely appointed guide to lead mankind to the
 Celestial Paradise, no matter how he may neglect
 his duty, hence his reverence for the office checks
 him even here in the full fury of his denunciation of
 Pope Nicholas.

Dante's
 Reverence for
 the Papal
 Office

CANTO XIX

'And were it not that still forbids it me
 The reverence for the Keys Supreme
 Thou hadst in keeping in the gladsome life,
 I would make use of words more grievous yet,
 Because your avarice afflicts the world,
 Trampling the good and lifting the depraved'¹

More striking still is his treatment of his enemy Boniface VIII. Though he consigns him prophetically to the 'tomb' for Simony, none the less does he denounce Philip the Fair for his outrage on him at Anagni. Unworthy though he was, Boniface by virtue of his office was the Vicar of Christ, and therefore the outrage from which he died was, in Dante's view, nothing less than a 'crucifying of the Son of God afresh.' In the following passage from the *Purgatorio*, Philip is 'the new Pilate,' and William of Nogaret and Sciarra Colonna, who plundered the Pope's palace, the 'living thieves'—'living' because, unlike the thieves on Calvary, they had not suffered the just penalty of their crime

'I see the fleur-de-lys Alagna enter,
 And Christ in his own vicar captive made
 I see him yet another time derided,
 I see renewed the vinegar and the gall,
 And between living thieves I see him slain
 I see the new Pilate so relentless
 This doth not sate him, but without decree
 He bears his greedy sails into the temple'²

Punishment of Let us now examine more particularly the punish-
Simoniacs ment of the Simoniacs At first glance, it is not

¹ *Inf* xix 100-105

² *Purg* xx 88-93 The last three lines refer to the destruction by Philip of the military order of Knights Templars on charges of heresy, sacrilege, and immorality. The points on which Dante fixes are the absence of fair trial ('without decree') and Philip's avaricious motive in the prosecution ('his greedy sails') 'The King,' says Villani

easy to see any natural connection between traffick- CANTO XIX
 in sacred offices and the doom of being set on
 one's head in a dry well, with feet writhing upwards,
 and fire playing on the soles, nevertheless every
 detail of the punishment has its own special signifi-
 cance, and flows naturally out of the sin. The most
 general idea is that Simony is the entire perversion
 of holy things, and in symbol of this the men who
 practise it are themselves turned upside down. The
 fire upon the feet is not so easy to understand. We ^{The Fire on}
 may put aside the suggestion that 'the flaming feet ^{the Feet}
 are intended as in direct contrast to the *numbus*,
 which would have adorned the heads of the Popes if
 they had laid up for themselves a crown of glory.
 Instead of that their avarice has only earned for
 them burning feet'¹ This is an interpretation fitted
 on from the outside, whereas we must look for the
 meaning inside the very nature of the sin of Simony.
 It is a sin against the Holy Ghost. In true ordina-
 tion the gift of the Holy Ghost is imparted by the
 laying on of hands upon the head. Now, on the day
 of Pentecost the Holy Ghost appeared in the form
 of tongues of fire on the heads of the Apostles, and
 it is this fire which now burns on the feet of the
 men who have turned the whole meaning of ordina-
 tion upside down. There is more here than mere
 grim and scornful humour. The Spirit of God,

(viii 92), 'was moved by his avarice, and made secret arrangements with the Pope (Clement v) and caused him to promise to destroy the Order of the Templars, laying to their charge many articles of heresy, but it is said that it was more in hope of extracting great sums of money from them'. See Froude's 'The Templars' in *Spanish Story of the Armada and Other Essays*

¹ Vernon, *Readings*, II 77 n., so also Scartazzini, Plumptre, etc

CANTO XIX Dante seems to say, must be to us one of two things
 —a fire upon the head kindling our loftiest faculties
 with power from on high, or a fire upon the feet, the
 torment which comes upon the man who sets his
 lowest faculties uppermost. The reference to ordi-
 nation is very subtly suggested in lines 28-30:

Even as the flaming of anointed things is wont
 To move upon the outer surface only,
 So was it there from the heels to the points.

The suggestion has been made that Dante is think-
 ing of the oily skin of priests who have grown fat
 on the spoils of their simony; but it is much more
 probable that the reference is still to ordination.
 In the consecration of bishops, the anointing or
 unction with the chrism is an essential part of the
 ceremony. It is possible, of course, that Dante is
 thinking of the sacrament of Extreme Unction, in
 which the feet and other parts of the body are
 anointed. If so, his meaning is that this last anoint-
 ing of the dying is powerless to save men whose
 simony destroyed the very meaning of the Sacra-
 ments: their feet still bear the traces of the holy
 oil, but all the same the fire of perdition plays upon
 the surface of it.

Symbolism of
 the Inversion
 of Simonists

The scornful symbolism is carried out in many
 other directions. When, for example, he first ad-
 dressed Nicholas, Dante tells us that he stooped
 down to hear his reply

even as the friar who is confessing
 The treacherous assassin, who, when he is fixed,
 Recalls him, so that death may be delayed ¹

¹ *Inf* xix 49-51

The punishment of assassins was burial head down- CANTO XIX
ward in the earth, and Dante may himself have
seen one of these criminals at the last moment,
when the soil was about to be filled in around
his head, gain a short respite by recalling the friar
under pretence of making a further confession. It
is something more than a mere simile. The sugges-
tion is that simoniacal Popes are 'treacherous assass-
sins' of the Church, murderers of her spiritual life,
and therefore justly meet the assassin's doom. The
openings in the rock remind him appropriately of
the little stone-pulpits in which so often unworthy
priests had stood to administer the sacrament of
Baptism; it is fitting that now they should stand
in them on their heads in token of the perversion
of this sacrament. Further, the way in which each
guilty Pope as he comes crushes his predecessor
down into the fissure and takes his place, is simply
a scornful infernal caricature of that Apostolic
Succession which they had bought and sold. Simon
Magus has his long line of successors as surely as
Simon Peter. And they too have their ordination
because they laid their hands on the heads of un-
worthy men, now their own heads are laid for ever
on the feet of their predecessors, receiving from that
long non-Apostolic line the gift of the unholy spirit
—Simony being a sin which, once begun, is easily
transmitted from Pope to Pope. In short, Dante
deliberately constructed this punishment in every
detail of it to indicate the shame and everlasting
contempt which he believed God would pour out
on men who perverted the whole meaning of the

CANTO XIX Christian religion by buying and selling the Holy Ghost

Sacrilege,
Real and
Imaginary

One point remains which is interesting for its personal reference to Dante himself. We saw how he compares the perforations in the rock to the little openings in 'my beautiful St John,' in which the priest stood when baptizing—one of which, he adds,

not many years ago

I broke for some one who was drowning in it

Be this a seal all men to undeceive ¹

The story as given by old writers is that on some festival day (according to one tradition, an Easter Eve, the same Eve as in the poem here), the Baptistry of Florence being crowded, a boy fell head foremost into one of the little stone-pulpits for the priests, and became so wedged that he was in danger of being suffocated. To save the boy's life, Dante, who was in the crowd, called for an axe, broke the side of the pulpit, and set him free. Evidently his enemies denounced this as an act of sacrilege, and the poet here gives 'a seal all men to undeceive.' What then is this 'seal'? Simply the setting side by side, as he does here, of true sacrilege and apparent. To his mind, a human life was more sacred than any stonework of a church, even though it formed part of the holy font of baptism itself. It is quite possible that the charge of sacrilege against Dante was urged by ecclesiastics worthy of this Moat, for men who destroy the spirit of religion are ever the most jealous of its forms, and this is his reply. In effect he says 'Which is the real

¹ *Inf* xix 19 21

sacrilege: for the sake of a human life to destroy a
piece of church-furniture, or for the sake of wealth
to destroy the Church itself by selling its holy
offices to unholy men, who prove its spiritual
assassins? I, indeed, broke the baptismal font,
you break the sacrament itself, destroying at one
stroke the double baptism of water and of fire ' CANTO XIX

CHAPTER XVIII

CIRCLE VIII.—MALEBOLGE THE FRAUDULENT

Bolgia IV. Diviners

CANTO XX WHEN Virgil had carried Dante out of the valley of the Simoniacs, he laid him down on the summit of the arch of the next bridge, a rugged cliff so steep that even 'for the goats it would be hard passage' The reference is probably to the difficulty and danger of climbing safely across the sin punished in the fourth Moat of Malebolge It is Divination, a sin which not infrequently attacks men of intellect It is more than possible that Dante himself may have felt its fascination, and, but for the protecting arms of Reason, might have stumbled and fallen into its abyss The sure step of Virgil on this steep ridge has, however, a special significance. We must remember that the popular legends of the Middle Ages had transformed the great Latin poet into a diviner and enchanter,¹ and, of course, had Dante accepted this view he must have set Virgil in this very Moat He did, indeed, regard him as a diviner in the true sense—a prophet outside of Israel, who foresaw the advent of the Christ It was necessary, therefore, to vindicate Virgil against the

**Bolgia IV —
Diviners**

**Virgil's
Repute as a
Wizard**

¹ See Comparetti's *Virgil in the Middle Ages*

popular conception of him; and this he does by CANTO XX
 showing the ease with which he mounts this steep
 arch which spans the sin of Divination, where even
 a goat would find it hard to make its way.

Gazing down into the valley, Dante sees a proces- The Procession
of Diviners
 sion of souls pacing slow as when the Litany is sung,
 and all weeping silently. The silence may be, as
 some think, part of the punishment, in contrast to
 the charms and incantations which they used to
 mutter on earth, and the slow pacing may refer to
 the solemn mystic movements with which they once
 performed the ritual of their unholy arts. The chief
 penalty, however, is that their heads are reversed,
 and they can see and walk no way but backward.
 Divination is an impious attempt to see into the
 future, and now 'to look forward has been taken
 from them' Virgil points out and names eight
 souls—five from his own world of antiquity, and
 three from near Dante's time. First of the ancients
 comes Amphiaraus, the great hero and seer of Argos, Amphiaraus.
 and, like Capaneus, one of the Seven against Thebes.
 Foreseeing his own death in this war, he hid him-
 self, but his wife, Eriphyle, bribed by Polynices
 with the fatal necklace of Harmonia, revealed the
 place of his concealment. The ending of the ancient
 story is very different from that of Dante's version.
 According to the classical legend, at the moment
 when Amphiaraus was about to be struck by a
 spear, Zeus saved him by opening the earth with
 his thunderbolt to swallow him together with his
 horses and chariot. Immediately he became a god
 in the popular mind, was worshipped in many places,

CANTO XX and consulted as an oracle. All this is reversed by
 — Dante The Thebans when they see him sink into
 the earth cry after him

‘ “Whither rushest thou,
 Amphiaræus? Why dost leave the war ? ” ’—

a taunt for his former concealment of himself. Instead of rising again to divine honours as an oracle, Dante represents him as continuing his head-long rush into the earth as far as Minos, the judge of every sinner. While in the world above men build temples to him and consult him as a god who knows the future, here below he walks his weary backward path, with head reversed, and eyes that see no way but behind

‘ Because he wished to see too far before him
 Behind he looks, and backward makes his way ’¹

Tiresias

After him paces Tiresias, the blind soothsayer of Thebes, who foretold the victory of the city in its war with the Seven Kings. Ovid tells the story of his transformations to which Dante refers.² Having separated two serpents which he found intertwined in a wood, he was changed into a woman, at the end of seven years he found the same two serpents intertwined once more, struck them with his rod a second time, and was changed back into a man. In his case too the classical myth is reversed. Homer represents him as the only soul in Hades who retains his intellect unimpaired, he still carries his soothsayer's golden staff, and foretells to Odysseus the

¹ *Inf* xx 31 39

² *Metam* iii 323 331

course of his future wanderings. But Dante strips CANTO XX him of all this: so far from foreseeing the future, he cannot now see even the present.¹

The third Diviner is Aruns, the Etruscan, who fore- Aruns told the issue of the war between Cæsar and Pompey. He lived in a cave of the white marbles of Carrara, from which he could behold without obstruction the stars and sea, a reference perhaps to his practice of astrology.²

Next comes Manto, the daughter of Tiresias, Manto and her long hair falling down her breast instead of Mantua. her shoulders Virgil's native city, Mantua,³ was believed to have received its name from the Theban prophetess, and he takes the opportunity of explaining to Dante at considerable length how she became its founder. Starting with Lake Benacus, now Lago di Garda, he traces the river Mincio as it flows out of the south end of the lake at the great fortress of Peschiera, and soon afterwards spreads out into the unhealthy marsh which surrounds Mantua. To this marsh, then destitute of inhabitants, came 'the cruel virgin,' Manto, in the course of her wide wanderings after the death of her father and the enslavement of Thebes, 'the city of Bacchus.' Here, to shun all human intercourse, she and her servants remained for the practice of her arts. After her death, the men scattered around gathered themselves together to the place, partly for the protection of the marsh.

¹ *Odyssey*, x 495, xi 90-151, *Inf* xx 40-45

² *Inf* xx 46-51

³ Strictly the village of Andes, near Mantua, identified with the modern village of Pietole. See *Purg* xviii 82, 83

CANTO XX

'They built the city over those dead bones,
And after her who first the place selected,
Mantua named it, without other omen'

Virgil attaches great importance to this account of the founding of his native city, for he charges Dante that if he hears any other origin he is to give this, the true one. The curious thing is that Virgil himself gives a different account. In the *Æneid* (x 198-200) the founding of the city is attributed to Ocnus, son of the river Tiber and the prophetess Manto, who gave it his mother's name. From the pointedness of his words, it is evident that Dante wished to correct the Virgilian legend, but his reason for laying such emphasis on the correction is unknown. Another curious difficulty is connected with Manto. In the *Purgatorio* (xxii 109-114) Virgil in his conversation with the poet Statius tells him that he saw in Limbo several of his people, that is, the characters in his *Thebaid* and *Achilleid*—among the rest 'the daughter of Tiresias'. It is difficult to think that this is any other than the Manto here, and it is even more difficult to suppose that after writing this long passage about her, he could entirely forget it, and set her in a totally different part of the *Inferno*. If there is a slip of memory, the passage before us must have been written after the incidental reference in the *Purgatorio*.¹

Eurypylus

The fifth and last of the ancient seers is Eurypylus. Here again, according to the commentators, Dante

¹ *Inf* xx 52 102 'This is an unique instance of inaccuracy on D's part in a matter of this kind, the only explanation seems to be that he has in some way confused Manto, daughter of Tiresias, with Manto, daughter of Hercules' (Toynbee)

seems to nod. Virgil says that Eurypylus was associated with the prophet Calchas in the giving of the signal for the sailing of the Greek fleet from Aulis against Troy, adding,

‘ And thus sings him
My lofty Tragedy in some place or other
Well knowest it thou, who knowest it all ’

When we turn to the *Æneid*, we find him mentioned with Calchas, not in connection with the sailing of the Greeks for Troy, but with their departure from it when the war was over, or rather when they had grown wearied and discouraged with the length of it. Driven back time after time by storms, they sent Eurypylus to consult the oracle of Apollo, and he brought back the answer that as they had sailed from Aulis through the sacrifice of a Grecian life, by a like sacrifice they must now return. It is curious if Dante really makes a slip at the very moment when he is priding himself on his perfect knowledge of his Virgil. Fortunately, so far as we can see, nothing important in the moral interpretation of the passage turns on either of the alleged mistakes.¹

We come now to the Diviners of more modern times. Three are specially named

‘ That other who is so slender in the flanks
Was Michael Scott, who of a verity
Of magic frauds did know the game
Behold Guido Bonatti, behold Asdente,
Who now unto his leather and his thread
Would fain have stuck, but too late repents ’²

Asdente (*i.e.* Toothless) was the nickname of a shoe-

¹ *Inf* xx. 106-114, *Æn* ii. 108-129

² *Inf* xx. 115-120.

CANTO XX **—** maker of Parma who lived in the thirteenth century, and is said to have foretold the defeat of Frederick II. in his siege of that city in 1248. He seems to have been widely known and talked of in his day, for in the *Convito* Dante says that if notoriety constituted nobility 'Asdente, the cobbler of Parma, would be more noble than any of his fellow-citizens'¹ Now, when it is too late, he wishes he had stuck to his last and let the art of divination alone His companion, Guido Bonatti, was astrologer to the great Ghibelline captain, Count Guido of Montefeltro, whom we shall find in the eighth Moat of this Circle. The story is that his master lost faith in him because a peasant foretold the weather more truly than he, whereupon Bonatti died of grief²

Guido
Bonatti

Michael
Scott

By far the most famous of the three, however, is the first-named, Michael Scott of Balwearie, in Fifeshire,

'A wizard of such dreaded fame,
That when, in Salamanca's cave,
Him listed his magic wand to wave,
The bells would ring in Notre Dame!'

Although claimed by Salerno and Toledo, there seems little doubt that he was a native of Scot-

¹ *Conv.* iv. 16

² Villani (vii. 81) in his account of the defeat of the French by Count Guido at the siege of Forlì in 1282, writes 'It is said that this same Count of Montefeltro was guided by the augury and counsel of one Guido Bonatti, a roof-maker, who had turned astrologer or the like, and that it was he who prompted his actions, and for this emprise he gave him the standard and said, "Thou hast it at such a pitch, that so long as a rag of it holds, wheresoever thou bearest it thou shalt be victorious." But I more believe that his victories were won by his own wit and mastery of war.'

land, where the legends of his exploits still linger, CANTO XX
or did in Sir Walter Scott's time 'In the South of Scotland,' he says, 'any work of great labour and antiquity is ascribed either to the agency of *Auld Michael*, of Sir William Wallace, or of the devil'¹

He lived in the thirteenth century, and was undoubtedly a man of great learning, having studied at Oxford, Paris, and Toledo At Paris, according to some accounts, he took his degree of doctor of theology At Toledo he learned Arabic, and thus became acquainted with the numerous translations of Aristotle and commentaries on his works in that language In Germany he met the Emperor Frederick II, who attached him to his Court, and commissioned him to superintend a translation of Aristotle into Latin He was the author of numerous works on astrology, alchemy, and the occult sciences Dante seems to refer to his emaciation through severe study, when he says he was 'so slender in the flanks'; but it is possible that the allusion is to his supposed power of making himself invisible at will. He is said to have foretold the death of Frederick and to have foreseen his own According to some accounts he died in Sicily soon after his master, but the usual view is that he returned to his native country, where he died in 1250, or thereabout 'Tradition,' says Sir Walter, 'varies concerning the place of his burial some contend for Holme Coltrame in Cumberland, others for Melrose Abbey, but all agree that his books of magic were interred in his grave, or preserved in the convent where he died.'

¹ *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, Canto II and note

CANTO XX After these Virgil points out hurriedly a troop of
Witches witches

'See the wretched women who left the needle,
 The shuttle, and the spindle, and made them divineresses,
 They wrought their sorcery with herb and image'¹

'Herb' refers to love-philtres, and there can be no doubt, as Plumptre says, that 'practically such women carried on a direct trade in poisoning.' The 'image' refers to the well-known superstition that a person can be killed by making a waxen effigy of him and sticking pins into it, or holding it to the fire till it melts away. Virgil hurries Dante on after a mere glance, for already 'Cain and the thorns'² stands on the horizon and 'touches the wave beneath Seville' in other words, the moon is setting in the west some time between six and seven on the Saturday morning, the day after they began the pilgrimage. It is sunrise, but the sun being the sensible image of God³ is too sacred to be named in this lost world of darkness and eternal night. All indications of time, even during the day, are given by means of the moon.

Punishment of Turning now to the punishment, it is obvious that
the Reversed it is taken from *Isaiah*, xlv 24-25, 'I am the Lord,
Head that maketh all things, that stretcheth forth the
 heavens alone, that spreadeth abroad the earth,

¹ *Inf* xx 121 123

² With reference to the popular superstition that Cain is 'the Man in the Moon'. According to some forms of the story, the thorns are those with which he strove in vain to hide the body of his murdered brother, and the wandering moon may be regarded as the land of Nod (Wandering) into which he was banished. (Comp *Mids Night's Dream*, iii 1, v 1, Leland's *Legends of Florence* first series, p 254)

³ *Conv* iii 12.

who is with me? That frustrateth the tokens of
 the liars, and *maketh diviners mad; that turneth* CANTO XX
wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge
 foolish' The punishment is entirely natural, men
 who pry into the future get their heads turned, and
 lose the power of seeing even the present Take,
 for instance, that comparatively harmless form of
 divination which survives among ourselves—the
 foretelling from the apocalyptic books of Scripture
 of the course of the future history of the world till
 the day of judgment is it not the simple truth that
 this prying into the future turns men's heads and
 blinds them to the signs and movements of the
 present moment? A similar turning of wise men
 backward and making of their knowledge foolish is
 seen in modern spiritualism, which consists of prying
 into the secrets of another world It is, of course,
 impossible to say that there can be no communica-
 tion between world and world, or that 'no traveller
 returns', but one of the penalties of this constant
 peeping through the keyhole of the future world is
 undoubtedly that men have their heads turned, and
 grow unfitted for dealing sanely with the affairs
 and business of the world in which God has set
 them It is the penalty He has appointed for any
 irreverent attempt to tear aside the veil which He
 has mercifully drawn between man and the future
 and invisible

To Dante it is a punishment so terrible that, when
 he sees the distorted forms, and the tears of the
 sufferers falling down their backs, he weeps in sym-
 pathy with them.

Virgil's
 Rebuke of
 Dante's Pity

CANTO XX

Truly I wept leaning on one of the rocks
Of the hard crag.

Although he appeals to the reader to think how it was possible for him to keep his face dry at such a sight, Virgil gives him a very stern rebuke

‘Art thou too of the other fools?
Here pity lives when it is wholly dead
Who is a greater reprobate than he
Who bears compassion at the doom divine?’

‘Art thou too of the other fools?’—that is, the fools in this Moat, the Diviners, who are also weeping. It is to be noted that in Italian *pietà* has the double meaning of *pity* and *piety*, and Dante has both in view. To retain the two Plumptre translates line 28

‘Here piety lives when pity’s self hath died’¹

In other words, it is a great impiety to impugn by our pity the justice of God’s judgments upon sinners. Longfellow quotes Omar Khayyám to the same effect

‘O Thou who burn’st in Heart for those who burn
In Hell, whose fires thyself shall feed in turn,
How long be crying, “Mercy on them, God!”
Why, who art Thou to teach, and He to learn?’

Thomas Aquinas teaches that the saints rejoice in

¹ *Inf* xx 19 30 There is the same double meaning in *Par* iv 105, where of Alcmaeon it is said that ‘not to lose piety (*pieta*) he became pitiless (*spietato*)’. The piety consisted in obeying the command of his father, Amphiaras, to slay his mother, the pitilessness was his putting of her to death. In *Conv* iv 21, Dante names *pieta* as one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, and in ii 11, he says it is ‘not a passion, but rather a noble disposition of the mind, prepared to receive love, mercy, and other charitable passions’.

the sufferings of the lost, as discerning in them the justice of God. 'A thing can be a joy in two ways: (1) For itself (*per se*), when one rejoices in the thing as such, and in this way the saints do *not* rejoice in the sufferings of the wicked; (2) Indirectly (*per accidens*), on account of something else joined to it; thus the saints will rejoice in the sufferings of the wicked, considering in them the order of divine justice.'¹

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Nevertheless the sharpness of Virgil's rebuke cannot but surprise us. On several occasions, as we have seen, he had allowed Dante's pity, or even approved of it, as in the case of the Violent against Nature; why, then, has it become an impiety now? One reason has been already referred to. In the Middle Ages Virgil had the reputation of being a diviner himself, and the very severity of his rebuke is Dante's way of clearing him of this dark fame by showing how sternly he judged this sin. But undoubtedly the deepest reason lies in the nature of the sin itself. It is a sin almost incomprehensible to the modern mind, we smile away wizardry and witchcraft, astrology and fortune-telling, as harmless superstitions. The theology of the Middle Ages, however, following Scripture, took a much more serious view of it. Aquinas, for example, discusses the question, Is Divination a sin?—Divination being defined as 'some sort of prediction of things to come.' His answer is that things which happen by necessary and invariable causes, such as eclipses, can be predicted without sin. So also can those things which

Reason for its severity

¹ *Summa*, Supp. q. xciv. a. 3

CANTO XX happen, 'not necessarily and invariably, but generally, failing however at times,' such as rain or drought. But there is a third class of things which are 'indeterminate, and may work either way,' and these God alone can foreknow, and therefore to *divine* them is an infringement of His prerogative. 'To consider such effects in themselves before they take place, is proper to God, who alone in His eternity sees future things as present. Hence it is said "Show the things that are to come hereafter, and we shall know that ye are gods" (Isa xli 23). If any one therefore presumes to foretell or foreknow future things of this character, otherwise than by God's revealing them to him, he manifestly usurps to himself the prerogative of God, and from this some are called *diviners*. Hence Isidore says "Diviners are so called as being full of God for they pretend to be full of the Divinity, and with fraudulent cunning they conjecture what is to befall man in the future." It is not therefore called *divination*, if one foretells things which happen of necessity, or happen generally, which things can be foreknown by human reason, or if one knows by revelation of God other events which are to happen, though not of necessity, in the future for then he is not himself *divining*, that is, doing what is divine, rather he is receiving what is divine. But then only is a man said to *divine*, when he arrogates to himself in an undue manner the foretelling of future events, and this is certainly a sin¹. It is probably for this reason that Diviners are set lower than even

¹ *Summa*, ii ii q xcv a 1

Simoniacs. Simony is, indeed, a trafficking in the Spirit of God, but Divination is, as it were, a pretence of actually *being* the Spirit, a bold usurpation of the attributes of God and exercise of His prerogative. It was a fraud, therefore, practised upon the spiritual nature of men it robbed them of the true God and of the trust for their future which they ought to place in Him For manifestly it is a spiritual impossibility for a man who relies on a diviner to rely also upon God The very attempt to unveil the future is an effort to free oneself from the necessity of leaning on the Divine providence and care, an impious attempt to make oneself independent of them. This is the reason for the sharpness of Virgil's rebuke of Dante's pity, it is also the reason for that peculiar severity against every form of Divination which perplexes us in Scripture. In ages of superstition, when Divination abounds, it is almost, if not quite, impossible for men either to form any worthy conception of God or to repose any trust in His providence. It is, therefore, neither right nor reasonable to waste tears on men who practise on their fellows so heartless a deception of their highest spiritual instincts.

CANTO XX

CHAPTER XIX

CIRCLE VIII —MALEBOIGE THE FRAUDULENT

Bolgia V Barrators

1 *The Narrative*

CANTOS
XXI-XXIII
57
—

Barratry

TALKING of things 'of which,' says Dante, 'my Comedy cares not to sing,' the two pilgrims pass downward from the fourth bridge to the fifth, which spans the Moat of the Barrators. Barratry has several meanings. It was sometimes used as a synonym for Simony. In old Scots Law it is the taking of bribes by judges, but here it has the wider meaning of using any public office or position of trust for purposes of fraudulent gain—trafficking in justice, office, or employment. It is therefore in the State what Simony is in the Church, and we may guess the depth of Dante's hatred of it partly by the large space he devotes to it—nearly two and a half cantos—and partly by the coarseness and grotesquery with which he holds it up to abhorrence and contempt. We shall first give the narrative of Dante's adventures in this Bolgia, and then attempt some interpretation of them.

The Moat of Fitch

The Moat, says Dante, as he gazed down on it from the bridge, was 'marvellously dark'—literally pitch-

dark, indeed, for it was filled with pitch. He could discern nothing but the bubbles which rose and fell with the boiling of the black canal; and the sight reminded him of the cauldrons of boiling pitch which he had seen in the famous Arsenal of Venice, where its merchants re-caulked their ships to fit them for new voyages. Suddenly Virgil caught his companion and drew him to himself, crying 'Take care, take care!' Turning his startled eyes, Dante sees 'a black devil,' who, 'with open wings and light upon his feet,' rushes upon the bridge and flings into the river of pitch below a sinner whom he carried on his shoulders 'clutched by the sinews of the feet,' crying,

CANTOS
XXI-XXIII
57
—

The Alderman
of Lucca

'O Malebranche of our bridge,
Behold one of the Elders of Santa Zita,
Plunge him beneath, for I return for others
To that city which I have well furnished with them
Every one there is a barrator, except Bonturo
No into Yes for money there is changed'¹

Malebranche means Evil-claws, and is the general name of all the demons who infest this Moat. Santa Zita is the patron saint of Lucca, and the Elders or Ancients are the magistrates of that city, corresponding to the Priors of Florence. The exception of Bonturo Dati is ironical, for, if the early commentators are to be believed, he was the arch-barrator of the city, and managed nearly all its offices for his own profit. 'No into Yes for money there is changed' may mean that judges and magistrates at first refused men's suits and afterwards granted

¹ *Inf* XXI 37-42. The 'Elder' is said to have been one Martino Bottaro, who died in 1300.

CANTOS
XXI-XXIII
57
—

Santa Zita

them on payment of the desired bribe, but it is said to have had a more specific reference. In the Council of Lucca the votes were taken by urns, one for the Ayes, the other for the Noes, and the accusation is that the votes were cast into one or other according to the bribe. It has been suggested that in calling Lucca 'Santa Zita,' Dante is sneering at that city for having chosen a servant-maid as its patron saint, but this is a total misunderstanding of the very spirit of the poet. He is indeed sneering, but it is not at the poor servant-girl. His reason for naming her is undoubtedly to draw a contrast between her faithfulness in her humble position of trust and the unfaithfulness of these magistrates to their higher duties and responsibilities. Zita was a servant in the same family for nearly fifty years, and her master had such confidence in her integrity that he intrusted his whole household to her, giving her liberty to distribute alms to the poor out of his bounty at her own pleasure. Yet here are the magistrates of the city which had chosen this faithful servant-girl as its patron saint so unfaithful to their higher trust that this 'black devil' is kept busy carrying them to the river of pitch, which is the image of their sin.¹ With a fiendish joy in his infernal task he rushes back to Lucca for another load.

Never was a mastiff loosened
With so much hurry to pursue a thief

This, indeed, is the mark of the diabolic spirit—delight in the perdition of men—just as joy in their

¹ Zita died about 1275, and was canonized by Nicholas III, the Pope who 'pocketed himself' in the 'pouch' of the Simoniacs (*Inf.* xix. 72).

salvation is the sign of the angelic We read, for example, of a like haste on the part of the angel who ferried the souls across to Mount Purgatory the moment he landed his passengers he 'departed swiftly as he came,' eager to bring another load.

CANTOS
XXI-XXIII
57
—

When the Alderman of Santa Zita rose, face downward, in the boiling pitch, the demons who had been lurking under the bridge in wait for such sinners rushed at him and beat him down 'with more than a hundred rakes,' as scullions with their hooks thrust down the meat in the cauldron, crying,

'Here the Santo Volto has no place !
Here one swims otherwise than in the Serchio
Therefore if for our hooks thou wishest not,
Do not uplift thyself above the pitch.
It here behoves thee to dance covered,
That, if thou canst, thou secretly may'st pilfer '1

The Serchio is the river on which Lucca stands, and a favourite bathing-place of the citizens The *Santo Volto* or Holy Face is a famous crucifix still preserved in the Cathedral of that city The legend is that it was carved out of cedar-wood by Nicodemus, the face, which he had not dared to attempt, being finished by an angel while he slept. In 782 it was floated miraculously to the shores of Italy not far from Lucca, and its fame spread even to our own distant island William Rufus swore habitually 'by the Holy Face of Lucca,' and it is said that in the old London Church of St Thomas there was an effigy of it When this Alderman of Lucca rises from his plunge into the pitch 'doubled up,' the

The *Santo*
Volto of Lucca

¹ *Irf* XXI 48-54

CANTOS
XXI.-XXIII
57

demons humorously affect to believe that he is in the attitude of prayer, and mock him with the cry that here there is no Holy Face to invoke, as his custom was on earth Dante is said to have lived in Lucca in 1314, and probably it was then that he learnt the corruption of its magistrates, and indeed of the whole city

Virgil's Parley
with the
Malebranche

At this point Virgil thinks it prudent to conceal Dante among the rocks of the bridge above, while he descends into the Moat to hold parley with the fiends He warns him not to fear anything that may happen to himself, as he has been in a similar affray before and understands how to conduct it The reference is perhaps to the former journey which he had made through Hell,¹ or he may be speaking in his purely allegorical character of Reason, which knows by experience how to meet such a sin as this and overcome it The moment Virgil appears, the fiends with a roar of fury rush at him like dogs upon a beggar, but his resolute front daunts them He orders them to stand while one of their number comes forth to speak with him, whereupon their chief, Malacoda, advances, saying 'What will it avail him?' Virgil warns him not to oppose the Divine will which has ordained that he show another 'the savage way', and so humbles his arrogance that his grapnel drops from his hand He then calls to his companion to come out of his hiding-place among the rocks and join him Dante immediately rushes to his side for safety, but the demons gather round with such cries and threaten-

¹ *Inf.* ix 22-24

ings of their hooks that his own terror reminds him of how he once beheld the garrison of Caprona march out, when the fortress was taken, with glances of fear as they passed through the ranks of their victorious foes, lest they should break the treaty of surrender and slay them on the spot Malacoda, however, restrains his fiends for the moment. With a show of kindness he offers the travellers an escort as far as the next bridge over the sixth Moat, that of the Hypocrites, giving as his reason that the bridge at the point where they now stood was broken down

CANTOS
XXI-XXIII.
57
—

Malacoda's
Treachery

‘ You can no farther go
Forward upon this crag, because is lying
All shattered at the bottom, the sixth arch ,
And if it still doth please you to go onward,
Pursue your way along upon this ridge ,
Near is another crag which yields a path
Yesterday, five hours later than this hour,
One thousand two hundred and sixty-six years
Completed were since here the way was broken.’¹

The reference is to the earthquake of the Crucifixion which ruined the pathway that descends to the Circle of Violence, and shook down the bridges over the Moat of the Hypocrites Malacoda knows the date to an hour Dante tells us in the *Convito* that Christ died in His thirty-fourth year, and this added to 1266, brings us to 1300—the ideal date of the poem.² In the same passage he says that, according to St Luke, our Lord died at the sixth hour of the day, that is, at twelve o'clock noon, it was therefore seven o'clock in the morning of Easter Eve in

The Earth
quake of the
Crucifixion

¹ *Inf* XXI 106 114

² *Conv* IV 23

CANTOS
XXI.-XXIII.
57
—

the year 1300, when Malacoda spoke these words. Doubtless this show of minute accuracy was intended to deceive the travellers by inspiring them with confidence in his other statements. For his information about the bridges contains just that cunning admixture of truth and falsehood which is natural in a past-master of barratry. It was indeed true that the bridge over the next Moat was broken down at this particular point, but it was *not* true that by going farther round this valley they would find another bridge unbroken, as Malacoda promised them. *All* the bridges over the Moat of the Hypocrites had been shaken down by the earthquake, as Virgil to his indignation discovered when he reached it. In short, the obvious intention of Malacoda is to retain the strangers in his territory by this fiction of an unbroken bridge farther on, in the hope that some lucky chance would place them in the power of his fiends. For this purpose, under pretence of patrolling the banks of the canal, he detailed ten of them under a 'decurion' or lieutenant, named Barbariccia, to act as escort, and his command,

'Let these be safe as far as the other ridge
Which all unbroken goes across the dens,'¹

was in reality a secret order to destroy them if they could, since there was no 'other ridge' that was 'all unbroken'. The demons show that they understand the true meaning of their instructions, for 'each presses his tongue between his teeth toward their leader for a signal'. Dante, terrified at their gnash-

¹ Inf. xi. 125-126. The names of the fiends are given on p. 322.

ing teeth and threatening brows, entreats Virgil to dispense with such an escort, but he replies contemptuously, 'Let them gnash on according to their fancy'—only the wretches in the pitch need fear, they can do no harm to honest men. For once Virgil was quite mistaken. The sequel shows that Dante was right, and that the instinct of fear is sometimes a wiser and safer guide than Reason itself

CANTOS
XXI-XXIII.
57
—

Turning to the left along the bank of the canal, Dante saw some of the souls rise like dolphins out of the pitch to lighten their pain if only for a moment. Others lay on the brink with their muzzles out, like frogs, ready to plunge if they heard a sound of the demons who patrolled the banks. He still shudders, he tells us, to remember how one wretch who was a moment too late in plunging was caught by one of the demons by the hair, dragged ashore like an otter, and cruelly tortured.¹ At Dante's entreaty Virgil interferes, asking him who he is, and who are his companions in the pitch; but every now and then his story is interrupted by the impatience of the fiends to have their will of him. One gored him with his tusk, a second with his hook tore away a tendon from his arm, a third aimed a savage blow at his legs; and it was only by clasping him in his arms, and even then with difficulty, that the decurion, Barbariccia, protected him till his story was finished. His name, which he himself does not mention, is given by the early commentators as Ciampolo. He tells Virgil that he was a native of Navarre, that his father

Ciampolo of
Navarre

¹ *Inf* xxi 31-96

CANTOS
XXI-XXIII
57
—

Fra Gomita
of Gallura

Michel Zanche
of Logodoro

was a spendthrift knave who destroyed both himself and his goods, and that his mother in consequence had placed him in the service of a lord. From this he became a retainer of 'good King Thibault,' that is, Teobaldo II of Navarre, a man of great justice and clemency. It is said that he gained the entire confidence of the King, who left the disposal of offices and favours in his hands. At Virgil's request, he tells that his companion in the pitch who escaped when he was caught, was Fra Gomita, 'vessel of every fraud,' 'not a petty, but a sovereign barrator.' This Friar (of what Order is unknown) was appointed as his deputy or chancellor during his absence by Nino de' Visconti, Judge of the Judicature of Gallura in Sardinia.¹ The 'noble Judge,' as Dante calls him, would never believe the reports of his unfaithfulness, but when at last he discovered that he had accepted bribes and allowed certain of his enemies to escape from prison, Nino straightway had him hanged. Underneath the pitch the Friar has for crony Don Michel Zanche, Governor of Logodoro in Sardinia, and the two worthies are never tired, says Ciampolo, of gossiping of their native island. This Don Michel was vicar of Enzo, natural son of Frederick II. Enzo became King of Sardinia by his marriage with Adelasia, heiress of Logodoro and Gallura. Shortly after, this ill-fated prince was captured by the Bolognese, and died after more

¹ Dante meets Nino among the negligent rulers in the Valley of the Princes on Mount Purgatory (*Purg* viii 46-84). He was chief of the Guelph party in Pisa, and was treacherously driven out of the city by his grandfather, Count Ugolino della Gherardesca (*Inf* xxviii 124 xxxiii 78). See p. 441-450.

than twenty years' imprisonment His wife obtained a divorce, and married his vicar in Logodoro, this Michel Zanche, who about the year 1290 was treacherously murdered by his son-in-law, Branca d'Oria of Genoa Dante tells us that while the body of this traitor continued to 'eat, and drink, and sleep, and put on clothes,' his soul was frozen into the ice of Cocytus in the lowest Hell before the spirit of his murdered father-in-law had time to reach this moat of boiling pitch.¹

CANTOS
XXI-XXIII
57
—

Ciampolo's old earthly cunning now stands him in good stead, and proves itself a match even for the demons He proposes that if they withdraw themselves a little out of sight he will give to his comrades in the river a signal by whistling that the coast is clear, and thus for one they will have seven to torture At first, Cagnazzo and the rest oppose it as a transparent trick, but are finally persuaded by Alichino, who threatens Ciampolo that if he dares to dive into the pitch he will swoop down upon him with his wings

Ciampolo's
trick

The Navarrese well his time selected,
Planted the soles on land, and in an instant
Leaped, and from their purpose freed himself :

Alichino's pursuit was in vain—'wings could not outstrip the terror' As he returned angry and weary, like a falcon that has missed its prey, Calcabrina, only too glad of an excuse for a quarrel, grappled with him, and the two fiends fell fighting into the boiling pitch, which so 'belmed' their wings that their companions had to drag them out

Quarrel of the
Malebranche

¹ *Inf* xxxiii 136 147 See p 456 458

² *Inf* xxi 121 123

CANTOS
XXI.-XXIII

57

Flight of the
Poets

with their hooks. Virgil and Dante took advantage of the fray to escape from such dangerous company, suspecting that they would next turn on them their disappointed fury. Nor were they mistaken, for on looking back, Dante was terrified to see them not far off in hot pursuit 'with wings outspread.' This time even Virgil did not venture to confront them. Snatching Dante up, as a mother her child in a burning house, he flung himself down the rocky bank into the next valley, not waiting to look for any bridge. And only in time, for they reached the bottom just as the fiends appeared on the ridge above, beyond which 'the high Providence' had ordained that they could not pass.

CHAPTER XX

CIRCLE VIII.—MALEBOLGE: THE FRAUDULENT

Bolgia V. Barrators

2 The Interpretation

WE have now before us the long, hideous, and grotesque narrative, the reading of which seems almost to leave the stain of its defilement on the mind. When we turn to the interpretation, the difficulty lies in the multiplicity of the meanings which Dante has woven together almost inextricably. Let us begin by examining the form of this 'Pantomime of Hell,' as one has called it. It was probably suggested by the morality-plays of the Middle Ages, if not, indeed, as many think, by one in particular. In the *Chronicle* of Villani we have the record of an extraordinary 'morality' performed on the river Arno in 1304, which may well have been in Dante's mind. The inhabitants of a certain quarter of Florence, we read, 'sent forth a proclamation that whosoever desired news of the other world should come on the first day of May upon the Carraia Bridge, and beside the Arno, and they erected upon the Arno a theatre upon boats and vessels, and thereupon they made the similitude and figure of hell, with fires and other pains and sufferings, with men

CANTOS
XXI-XXIII
57
—

A Morality
Play on the
Arno—May
1304

CANTOS
XXI-XXIII
57
—

disguised as demons, horrible to behold, and others which had the appearance of naked souls, which seemed to be persons, and they were putting them to the said divers torments, with loud cries, and shrieks, and tumult, which seemed hateful and fearful to hear and to see, and by reason of this new pastime there came many citizens to look on, and the Carraia Bridge, which then was of wood from pile to pile, was so burdened with people that it gave way in many places, and fell with the people which were upon it, wherefore many were killed and drowned, and many were maimed, so that the pastime from sport became earnest, and, as the proclamation had said, many by death went to learn news of the other world, with great lamentation and sorrow to all the city, for each one believed he must have lost his son or his brother there, and this was a sign of future ill, which in a short time should come to our city through the exceeding wickedness of the citizens, as hereafter we shall make mention '¹ It is far from unlikely that this grotesque morality-play on the Arno was in Dante's mind when he wrote this part of the *Inferno*, particularly as there are other things, to be explained later on, which appear to connect this Moat with Florence in a peculiar way

Symbolism of
the Pitch—
Defilement

The symbolism of the pitch is comparatively easy and simple. It is generally agreed that it represents the clinging and defiling power of money, when men stoop to gain it by the fraudulent use of positions and offices of public trust. Perhaps Ruskin's way of putting it is the most interesting 'This lake of pitch

¹ Villani, viii 70

is money, which, in our own vulgar English phrase, "sticks to people's fingers"; it clogs and plasters its margin all over, because the mind of a man bent on dishonest gain makes everything within its reach dirty, it bubbles up and down, because underhand gains nearly always involve alternate excitement and depression, and it is haunted by the most cruel and indecent of all the devils, because there is nothing so mean, and nothing so cruel, but a speculator will do it '¹

CANTOS
XXI-XXIII
57
—

Another obvious element in this punishment of the **Darkness** pitch is one which exists more or less in every Circle of the lost, namely, darkness. When, for example, the Alderman from Lucca rose after his plunge in the black river, the demons from under the bridge thrust him down with their hooks, crying,

'It here behoves thee to dance covered,
That, if thou canst, thou secretly may'st pilfer'

As on earth these Barrators had wrought their frauds in secret, loving the darkness because their deeds were evil, now they shall have enough of it. A lifetime of dark and underhand dealing and violation of public trust, such as these men were guilty of, produces a deep and terrible moral blindness from which escape is impossible. The demons of their own habitual evil stand on the banks and violently thrust them down. Dante saw in this particular form of fraud the most blinding of all sins, others do, indeed, darken the air, and one even plunges into a black mire, but this produces pitch-darkness from which

¹ *Fors Clavigera*, Letter xviii p. 12

CANTOS
XXI-XXIII
57

Pain of the
Boiling Pitch

the soul never escapes—it has become its eternal element and portion.

It is not so easy to say what is represented by the boiling of the pitch. If the souls here could be supposed to have a touch of nobleness left, it might mean the torment of shame—the agony of having the fair and honourable reputation which they once bore stripped off, and themselves revealed as men who vilely abused the high posts of power and office with which their fellow-men had intrusted them. One remembers the disgrace and fall of a man like Francis Bacon, and the burning, defiling pain it must have been to make public confession of this very sin of barratry ‘I beseech your Lordships to be merciful to a broken reed’ Shame like this can hardly have existed here, for the very capacity of such feeling would probably carry within it some power of repentance and salvation. It is much more likely, therefore, that Dante has in view pain of another kind, of which we have many hints in the *Inferno*—the torment of the evil desires and habits of a lifetime suddenly dammed-up by death, denied an outlet, and for ever turned back upon the soul in a baffled, impotent longing. Doubtless these Barrators were as dead to shame as the fiends who preyed upon them, but they were only too keenly alive to the loss of all the worldly possessions for which they had sinned away their souls, the loss too of every opportunity of pursuing their old fraudulent career, the only one they were now fit for. Dante tells how the two old rogues from Sardinia talk over their former frauds, as old soldiers re-fight their battles:

if it eased their pain to go over them in memory, it probably also increased it by reminding them that the old lust of the world and the old cunning, fraudulent power to gain it, which still burned within them, were now doomed to find no outlet and field for ever. Death had outdone them at their own game, and played a finer trick on them than any they had ever played on their fellows. The pain, then, of the boiling pitch may well represent the agony of knowing that they have lost at one cast their souls and the prize for which they staked them, that no fraud they ever practised on their fellow-men is so great as that with which they cheated themselves, and that now all outlet and field is for ever denied to that one master vice to which they have narrowed down their whole life and being

Still further, they receive from the demons who patrol the banks precisely the same treatment as they gave to their fellow-men on earth. When the fiends lie in ambush under the bridge and among the rocks that they may surprise and hook the unwary, the obvious meaning is that Barrators receive back in kind the frauds and cruelties they had practised upon others. Just so had they lurked for the unwary, caught them in their toils, tortured them without mercy, and now with what measure they meted to others, it is measured to them again. As one says, they had 'skinned' others, now they themselves are skinned.

In short, the demons are the infernal image of the sin of Barratry, and, revolting as they are, it may be worth while to examine them more closely that

CANTOS
XXI-XXIII
57
—

The Demons
repay in kind.

The Male-
branche—
the Image of
the Sin.

CANTOS
XXI-XXIII
57
—

we may understand Dante's estimate of the vice. To begin with, these fiends are a dreadful mingling of the diabolic and the brute. Their general title is *Malebranche*, which means Evil-claws. Twelve are named, and although in some cases the meaning of the names is uncertain, in others the obvious reference is to their resemblance to certain wild and ferocious beasts · such as *Cagnazzo*, Dog-face, *Draghinazzo*, Dragon-face, *Ciriatto*, Swine-face; and *Graffiaccane*, Scratch-dog¹. They represent Dante's estimate of Barratry · it is a diabolic sin, brutal in its cruelty. Further, it is as cunning as it is brutal. It lurks in secret places, it has hooks to catch its victims, and wings to swoop down on them if they attempt to escape. It knows well how to use words with a secret meaning, as when *Malacoda* instructed the escort to have the travellers in safety as far as the next unbroken bridge, knowing perfectly that no such bridge existed. It has every kind of knowledge at its command that may serve its fraudulent purposes · who, for example, could have expected *Malacoda* to know the date of the Crucifixion to an hour? Yet the knowledge has its use, and is cunningly put forward to create confidence in his other statements.

Grossness of
the Fiends

It is perhaps natural that readers should be some-

¹ The names of the twelve are as follows

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1 <i>Malacoda</i> | 7 <i>Libicocco</i> |
| 2 <i>Scarmiglione</i> | 8 <i>Draghinazzo</i> |
| 3 <i>Barbariccia</i> | 9 <i>Ciriatto</i> |
| 4 <i>Allichino</i> | 10 <i>Graffiaccane</i> |
| 5 <i>Calcabrina</i> | 11 <i>Farfarello</i> |
| 6 <i>Cagnazzo</i> | 12 <i>Rubicante</i> |

The last ten form the escort sent with the two travellers by the captain, *Malacoda*

what scandalized by the grotesqueness and grossness of the fiends; but we may be sure that when a man like Dante writes deliberately as he does in these Cantos, he has a meaning and a purpose. His aim is partly to show his utter contempt for this sin; and partly to declare his conviction that this grossness and indecency are of the very essence of the vice. He distinctly disclaims responsibility for such companions

CANTOS
XXI-XXIII.
57
—

We went upon our way with the ten demons,
Ah savage company! but, in the church
With saints, and in the tavern with the gluttons!¹

In other words, he did not create the fiends, he found them there, and a man cannot always choose his company. If they are gross, it is because the sin of which they are the image is gross, an outrage upon public decency. The betrayal of public trusts for gain is a thing so foul that it changes a man into a demon who will shrink from nothing mean, base, or degrading in pursuit of his ends. Ruskin rightly defends this passage on the ground that 'it is not possible to express intense wickedness without some condition of degradation.' The passage, though long, is worth quoting in full. 'Malice, subtlety, and pride, in their extreme, cannot be written upon noble forms, and I am aware of no effort to represent the Satanic mind in the angelic form which has succeeded in painting. Milton succeeds only because he separately describes the movements of the mind, and therefore leaves himself at liberty to make the form heroic, but that form is never distinct enough

Ruskin on
Form and
Character

¹ *Inf.* xxii 13 15

CANTOS
XXI-XXIII
57
—

to be painted. Dante, who will not leave even external forms obscure, degrades them before he can feel them to be demoniacal; so also John Bunyan both of them, I think, having firmer faith than Milton's in their own creations, and deeper insight into the nature of sin Milton makes his fiends too noble, and misses the foulness, inconstancy, and fury of wickedness. His Satan possesses some virtues, not the less virtues for being applied to evil purpose. Courage, resolution, patience, deliberation in counsel, this latter being eminently a wise and holy character, as opposed to the "Insania" of excessive sin: and all this, if not a shallow and false, is a smoothed and artistical, conception On the other hand, I have always felt that there was a peculiar grandeur in the indescribable ungovernable fury of Dante's fiends, ever shortening its own powers, and disappointing its own purposes, the deaf, blind, speechless, unspeakable rage, fierce as the lightning, but erring from its mark or turning senselessly against itself, and still further debased by foulness of form and action Something is indeed to be allowed for the rude feelings of the time, but I believe all such men as Dante are sent into the world at the time when they can do their work best, and that, it being appointed for him to give to mankind the most vigorous realization possible both of Hell and Heaven, he was born both in the country and at the time which furnished the most stern opposition of Horror and Beauty, and permitted it to be written in the clearest terms And, therefore, though there are passages in the *Inferno* which it would be im-

possible for any poet now to write, I look upon it as all the more perfect for them. For there can be no question but that one characteristic of excessive vice is indecency, a general baseness in its thoughts and acts concerning the body, and that the full portraiture of it cannot be given without marking, and that in the strongest lines, this tendency to corporeal degradation, which, in the time of Dante, could be done frankly, but cannot now And, therefore, I think the twenty-first and twenty-second books of the *Inferno* the most perfect portraitures of fiendish nature which we possess; and, at the same time, in their mingling of the extreme of horror with ludicrous actions and images, they present the most perfect instances with which I am acquainted of the terrible grotesque¹

CANTOS
XXI-XXIII.
57
—

There is another aspect of these demons which is seldom noticed, and yet can scarcely be accidental. I refer to the discipline, authority, and government which exist among them Twelve demons are named, and Malacoda is their captain He singles out ten as escort, and appoints Barbariccia as 'decurion' The discipline is wonderful, when we remember the brutal, fiendish nature of the company. At given signals they move off like soldiers, and on the whole, however sullenly, they obey the orders of their officers When two of them quarrel over the escape of a victim (as barrators often do), their comrades fly to separate them and drag them out of the pitch. This discipline and obedience to authority cannot be accidental From the moral side it pro-

Discipline of
the Fiends.

¹ *Stones of Venice*, vol. III chap. III. § III

CANTOS
XXI-XXIII
57
—

bably means that Barratry is usually carried on by several men in a conspiracy and working to one another's hands; that they are controlled by some master mind who uses the others as his tools; and that all quarrels among themselves are promptly suppressed lest the whole scheme of villainy should be ruined. Even a band of brigands cannot hold together and be successful in its robberies, unless some respect is paid to authority and discipline. One cannot help suspecting, however, that Dante has in all this a political meaning. We must remember that Barratry is to the State what Simony is to the Church, and in placing it in a lower Moat we see that he regarded it as a deeper sin¹. Now, in the Moat of the Simoniacs, we saw an infernal caricature of Apostolic Succession, a grotesque inversion of Church order and government. Here we have the same idea carried out. Barratry is the fraudulent use and sale of offices and employments of public trust, and therefore the subversion of the entire meaning and purpose of civil government. The men who are guilty of this use the authority and discipline originally meant for the safety and wellbeing of their fellows precisely as these fiends do—for their ruin and torture. The discipline of the demons, therefore, is the hellish caricature and parody of civil government, as the non-Apostolic Succession of the Simoniacs is that of ecclesiastical.

One last point. It is impossible to read these

¹ Just as, on the other hand, in the *Paradiso* Righteous Rulers of the State are set two Heavens higher than Theologians and Fathers of the Church

Cantos without the growing conviction that Dante has some peculiar personal interest in this Moat. It is the only place in Hell in which he was in actual personal danger, and this must refer to the fact that one of the charges on which he was banished from Florence was this very sin of Barratry—the misuse of public money during his magistracy. We cannot be far wrong if we see in his adventures with the fiends the story of his treatment at the hands of his countrymen; and in the way in which he brands the crime with infamy and indecency his indignant denial of guilt, just as Virgil cleared himself of the charge of wizardry in the Moat of the Diviners. If we thus connect it with Dante's fortunes, it gives significance to several points in the story which seem otherwise inexplicable. Take, for example, the names of the twelve fiends. It is extremely difficult to give any convincing explanation of them, but if the ingenious suggestion of Gabriel Rossetti is accepted, the general meaning would at once become clear. According to Rossetti, the whole scene in this Moat is a kind of infernal parody of the extraordinary morality-play performed on the Arno on May-day, 1304, the account of which has been already quoted from Villani. Further, Rossetti says that when in 1300 Cardinal Acquasparta was sent to Florence to make peace between the Blacks and Whites, there were twelve Priors of the city, and also that twelve representatives of the party of the Blacks were elected to treat with the Cardinal. The suggestion is that the names of the twelve demons are simply parodied from those of the twelve Priors or of the

CANTOS
XXI.-XXIII.
57
—
The Charge of
Barratry
Against
Dante

CANTOS
XXI-XXIII
57

—
The Male-
branche of
Florence

twelve Blacks. 'One name may recall the face of one of them, another may refer to some habit or custom of another. . . There may be some corroboration of his idea, Rossetti thinks, in the fact that at the time of the entrance of the Cardinal into Florence *Manno Branca* was Podestà, and from his name people may have got to call the magistrates under his sway *Malebranche*. If one remembers that the *gonfaloniere di giustizia*, or corporal of the city, at that time was *Jacopo Ricci*, one may be able to understand how the corporal of the band of ten demons came to be called *Barbariccia*. If one remembers that one of the *Priori* at the same time was one of the *Raffacani*, one may see from whence was bestowed on Hell the gift of the demon *Graffiaccane*. *Rubicante pazzo* may have been the nickname of Pazzin' de' Pazzi, who may have been rubicund in the face, with red hair'. As Dr Moore says, 'it might well result that, in spite of its present obscurity, the whole travesty might have been transparently obvious and irresistibly telling when the names and incidents were fresh in men's minds'¹. The most interesting thing, however, about this ingenious conjecture is the significance it would give to Dante's own danger in this Moat. When we remember how Virgil at the outset hid him among the rocks of the bridge, how the moment he appeared the fiends tried to get him into their hands, and finally how he had to save himself from their malice by flight. it is difficult to believe that

¹ Vernon's *Readings*, II 180-181, Moore's *Studies in Dante*, 2nd Series, 231-235

Dante is not describing the plots of his enemies in Florence to seize and punish him for this same sin of Barratry,—the very sin, he here declares, of which they themselves are guilty. For example, it has been asked why Dante did not return to Florence and face this charge. is not his absence proof of his guilt? The answer which I understand him to give in the story of his adventures with the demons is that he had no hope of justice. The men who sought to get him into their hands were, like these fiends, so cruel and treacherous as to be beyond the reach of reason. From such intensity of malice the only wisdom, even for an innocent man, is concealment and flight. Hence it is that Virgil, who is Reason personified, counsels him to hide, and at last is forced to snatch him up and flee from his pursuers. This flight is neither cowardice nor an acknowledgment of guilt, but simple prudence. Dante knew only too well that there is a fiendish depth of malignity, dead to every appeal of pity, reason, and justice, which it is certain death to face.

CANTOS
XXI-XXIII
57
—

Why Dante
did not face
the charge.

CHAPTER XXI

CIRCLE VIII.—MALEBOLGE· THE FRAUDULENT

Bolgia VI. Hypocrites

CANTOS THE Moat into which Virgil had flung himself and
XXIII 58- his companion with such headlong haste to escape
XXIV 60
—
The Procession of Hypocrites the fiends, turned out to be that of the Hypocrites:

A painted people there below we found,
Who went about with steps exceeding slow,
Weeping, and in their look wearied and overcome,¹

The 'painted' probably refers to their faces; and some regard their very weeping and slowness of pace as part of their old hypocrisy carried on into eternity. This, however, is doubtful, since both the slowness and the tears are sufficiently accounted for by the garments which they wear—gowns with great hoods hanging over their eyes. Dante compares them to those worn by the monks of Cologne. The story runs that the monks of the Abbey of Cologne in their pride petitioned the Pope for liberty 'to wear scarlet robes, with silver girdles and spurs. The Pope, considering their pride and presumption, ordered instead that they should wear extremely

¹ *Inf* xxiii 58-60

common robes, fashioned like an ashen-grey hair shirt, very long, and so ample that they dragged along on the ground behind them.¹ Dante clothes these souls in this exaggerated monk's gown because it is the appropriate garb of men who use religion as a cloak. But the chief peculiarity of the mantles of these hypocrites is that while outwardly they were so brightly gilded that they dazzled the eyes, inwardly they were of lead, and so heavy

CANTOS
XXIII 58-
XXIV. 60
—

That Frederick used to put them on of straw

The reference is to a tradition—said, however, to have no foundation—that the Emperor Frederick II. punished traitors by wrapping them in lead, and then exposing them to a heated furnace until the lead melted. Dante means that for weight Frederick's mantles were but straw in comparison.

The idea of this cloak of gilded lead, as Toynbee points out, was probably suggested by a curious etymology of the word hypocrite which was commonly accepted in the Middle Ages. According to the Latin Dictionary of Ugucione de' Bagni of Pisa, a grammarian of the twelfth century, *hypocrita* or *ypocrita* is derived from *yper*, above, and *crisis*, gold.² Although the etymology is false, the symbolism is obvious and true. The painted faces and the gilded cloaks are plain signs of that hypocrisy which our Lord described when He compared the Pharisees to 'whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones,

Symbolism of
the Painted
Face and the
Gilded Cloak

¹ Vernon's *Readings*, ii. 239 n.

² *Dante Studies and Researches*, p. 107. Ugucione's *Derivations* is mentioned only once—*Conv.* iv. 6

CANTOS
XXIII 58-
XXIV. 60
—

and of all uncleanness.' Dante's meaning is that when a man spends a lifetime in keeping up a fair outward show of piety and virtue, he cannot cast it off at will, it grows into the 'habit' of his soul, its garment of eternity. It might be thought that when a hypocrite enters a world where imposition is no longer possible, his punishment would be the stripping away of the gilded cloak of pious profession and the revelation of the long-hidden corruption, but Dante touches a more awful lesson when he clothes him in his own hypocrisy as in an eternal robe. The falseness has grown so much part and parcel of his very soul that he cannot cast it off even in a world where all hope of imposing on others is vain. Although all the souls in this Moat see through one another and know that all are false, not one lays aside the gilded cloak in consequence their doom is to wear it even among their fellow-hypocrites. They have acted a part so long that they have lost for ever the power of being themselves.

The Cloak of
Lead

But while all understand the painted face and the gilded cloak, few know the terrible symbolism of the crushing leaden weight under which the souls creep so slowly, weeping as they go. It means the almost intolerable burden of living a false life, the weariness of always acting a part, always keeping up the show of goodness. There is nothing more exhausting than to have a reputation for piety without the strength of true piety to sustain the reputation. Many a pious hypocrite would almost welcome even detection at times, simply because it

would lift away this weary weight of always acting a part, and restore him to a more natural and honest attitude toward his fellows. It is this weariness too which is the secret of those glaring lapses which sometimes surprise men with a reputation for piety. For, in this world at least, no man can always act: some time he must be himself. The bondage of a simulated character becomes intolerable, and he 'breaks out.' The secret of the lapse is the unbearable weight of hypocrisy's leaden gown—men will risk anything to throw it off even for a moment, and be themselves. We may imagine, then, the severity of the punishment when this weariness becomes the everlasting 'habit' of the soul, when it is impossible to lay it aside for a moment, and the man must remain for ever wrapped round with the heavy leaden weight of his own unreality. No wonder Dante exclaimed as he watched the slow procession of weeping souls,

CANTOS
XXIII. 68-
XXIV. 60
—

O weary mantle for Eternity!¹

So slow was the pace of the Hypocrites that the travellers had new company at every step; and Dante asks his Guide to keep his eye about him to see if he can find any one who is known by deed or name. A soul whom he had just passed, recognizing the Tuscan speech, called after him to stay his feet, and at Virgil's bidding he stops and waits. As he looked back he saw two whose faces showed their eagerness to overtake him, but they were hindered by 'the narrow way.' It is said that 'the

The Two
'Jovial Friars'
of Bologna

¹ *Inf* xxiii 67

CANTOS
XXIII. 58-
XXIV 60
—

narrow way' means the *crowded* way, and doubtless it was crowded. Nevertheless it is surely impossible to reject the obvious reference. Hypocrites profess on earth to walk in the narrow way which has few travellers, in the other world they still walk in a narrow way, but are jostled and impeded by the crowds which have made it the broad way of their destruction. When the two souls came up they took a long look at Dante, 'with eye askance,' and in absolute silence: the 'eye askance' being, no doubt, the furtive glance of the hypocrite who cannot look a man honestly in the face. Then, turning to each other, they express their surprise that one of the two strangers is alive, as they see by the action of his throat, and that neither wears the heavy gown. They beg the 'Tuscan' to tell them who he is; and Dante, after answering that he was born and bred 'in the great town on the fair river of Arno,' asks in turn who they are, and the meaning of their tears and glittering cloaks. They turn out to be men who knew the great town on the Arno well. One of them replies

'Fratì Godentì were we, and Bolognese,
I Catalano and he Loderingo
Named, and by thy city taken together,
As the wont is to take one man alone,
For maintenance of its peace, and we were such
That still it is apparent round Gardingo'¹

In other words, they were two natives of Bologna, Catalano de' Catalani and Loderingo degli Andalò, both Friars of the Order of the Knights of Our Lady.

¹ *Inf* xxiii 103-108

This Order was sanctioned by Urban IV. in 1261, Loderingo being one of its founders. According to Villani, they bound themselves 'to defend widows, and children under ward, and to be peacemakers';¹ it was also part of their rule to bear arms only in the service of the Church, and to 'hold no public office except for the purpose of promoting peace and union at such times as war and civil discord prevailed.' Many of the Bolognese, however, regarded the institution of the Order as an ingenious device for avoiding the bearing of arms for the city and the taking of their due share of public burdens. Their rules were lenient laymen as well as clerics were admitted, marriage was not forbidden, and their practice was so far from asceticism that their popular nickname was 'Fрати Godenti,' or 'Jovial Friars.' It was the custom in many Italian republics to invite some powerful nobleman of another city to act as Podestà or chief magistrate, under the idea that, being a foreigner, he would govern with greater impartiality. In the year 1266, Florence invited these two Bolognese noblemen to act as joint-mayors of the city. Catalano being a Guelph, and Loderingo a Ghibelline, the Florentines hoped that between them they would hold the scales of justice even between these two factions in the republic. As Plumptre says sarcastically, 'they were just so far impartial as to take bribes from both sides, betraying each in turn.' So badly did they keep the public peace to which they were bound by their religious vows, that the traces of

CANTOS
XXIII. 88-
XXIV. 60

¹ Villani, vii. 13

CANTOS
XXIII. 58-
XXIV. 60
—

their misrule, as Catalano confesses, were still visible in Dante's day round Gardingo near the Palazzo Vecchio, where the palaces of the Uberti were burnt in a rising against the Ghibellines. We may perhaps wonder why these Friars are not in the pitch of the Barrators in the preceding Moat, since they used their office of Podestà for corruption. The reason seems to be that they pursued their barratry under the cloak of religion. As we saw, part of their religious vow was to act as peacemakers among the warring factions of the State, yet they used their office to stir up strife, and for this hypocrisy they are sunk one bolgia lower.

The Crucifixion of Caiaphas

Just as Dante opened his lips to upbraid them for their evil deeds 'O Friars, your iniquitous . . .,' he was suddenly struck dumb by the sight which met him on the path

To mine eyes there rushed
One crucified with three stakes on the ground.
When me he saw, he writhed himself all over,
Blowing into his beard with sighs

Catalano informs the pilgrims that this is the High-Priest Caiaphas, and that Annas and the other members of the Sanhedrim who procured Christ's death lie similarly impaled in other parts of the valley

'This transfixed one, on whom thou gazest,
Counselled the Pharisees that it was expedient
To put one man to tortures for the people
Transverse and naked is he on the way,
As thou seest, and he needs must feel,

Whoever passes, first how much he weighs,
 And in like mode his father-in-law is punished
 Within this moat, and the others of the Council,
 Which was for the Jews a seed of evil '1

CANTOS
 XXIII 58-
 XXIV 60
 —

Virgil gazes in surprise at the crucified sinner, evidently because he was not here on his former journey through this Moat. The punishment is an obvious repayment in kind. the doom to which the members of the Sanhedrim devoted Christ now recoils upon themselves. Yet with significant points of difference. Christ was lifted up from the earth that He might draw all men unto Him, they are laid on the ground for every hypocrite to walk over. In this there is something peculiarly significant. It is no wonder that good men should scorn the crucifiers of Christ, and, as it were, trample them under foot; but it is at first glance strange that hypocrites should do so. Yet it is the simple truth. In every age since the crucifixion the hypocrites of the Christian religion have trampled in contempt on Caiaphas and his companions in this crime, not knowing that they themselves are partakers of the self-same spirit. Dante wishes to mark the last limit of scorn. the very hypocrites despise them and tread them underfoot. That these arch-hypocrites have no mantles may mean that as they crucified Christ naked, in like nakedness they are themselves crucified, and perhaps also it has some reference to our Lord's own words on the eve of His death. 'If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin. but now they have no cloke for

¹ Inf. xxiii 109 126

CANTOS
XXIII 58-
XXIV, 60
—

their sin.' Probably it is this which constitutes the special heinousness of the hypocrisy of Caiaphas and his accomplices,—it was hypocrisy naked and undisguised Christ seems to indicate in more places than one that His enemies knew the justice of His claims, and their special guilt was that they had deliberately sinned against this knowledge

The Broken
Bridges

Virgil now asks Catalano if there is any gap to the right by which he and Dante may pass to the next Moat without the help of 'the black angels,' the Malebranche from whom they had fled From the Friar's answer he learns the trick which Malacoda had played on him He tells him that all the bridges are broken down and lie in ruins on the bottom of this valley, but that they would be able to climb out upon the broken stones On hearing this Virgil stood still a moment with head bent, and then said,

' Ill did he relate the business
Who grapples with his hook the sinners yonder '

He is indignant at the deception, and angry at his own credulity he might have known, as the Friar reminds him, that the devil is a liar and the father of lies There is a depth of diabolic cunning which even Virgil cannot fathom, and he is annoyed that a hypocrite understands it better than he With large steps and angry brow, he moves on, but soon regains his serenity, reflecting probably that knowledge of the devil would be dearly bought at the price of being either barrator or hypocrite.

We have seen that Dante represents the bridges

which once spanned this Moat as broken down, in order to indicate the connection of Hypocrisy with the crucifixion of Christ. But probably he had also another purpose in view—to suggest the extraordinary difficulty of passing safely over this sin. The bridges are broken down, he is forced to descend into the valley of the Hypocrites, and it is with the utmost difficulty that he climbs out of it. Virgil has to push him up from behind from rock to rock, he warns him to try each crag above him to see if it will bear his weight, and when at last they reach the top of the ridge, Dante sinks to the ground breathless with the struggle. Ruskin explains this by the remark that Dante was ‘a notably bad climber,’ but the meaning goes much deeper. From his natural spirit and temper he must have been a stern hater of hypocrisy, yet he here tells us in his usual symbolic fashion how hard it is even for an honest man, and with the help of Virgil, the highest human wisdom, to climb clear of this sin in all its forms, and live a perfectly open and true life. He even appears to indicate that the crucifixion of Christ has greatly increased the difficulty. Then, to use his own words, ‘the universe was thrilled with love,’ the earthquake shook down the bridges and made the passage over more arduous. It is as if he meant to declare that the very love of Christ which died for men creates a new and more dangerous form of hypocrisy, more subtle in its temptations, and more difficult to avoid. Further, he tells us that even when a man has climbed arduously out of this valley a new temptation awaits him—

CANTOS
XXIII 58—
XXIV 60

Difficulty of
the climb out
of Hypocrisy

The ‘longer
Stairway’

CANTOS
XXIII 58-
XXIV 60

that, namely, of resting satisfied with this achievement This is the obvious meaning of Virgil's rebuke of Dante when he sinks down panting and exhausted.

'Now it behoves thee thus to put off sloth,'
The Master said, 'for sitting upon down,
Or under coverlet, one comes not into fame,
Without the which whoso his life consumes,
Such vestige leaveth of himself on earth,
As smoke in air and in the water foam
And therefore raise thee up, conquer the panting
With the soul which conquers every battle,
If with its heavy body it sink not down
A longer stairway it behoves to climb
'Tis not enough from these to have departed,
If thou understand me, now act so it profit thee'
Then I arose, showing myself furnished
Better with breath than I did feel myself,
And said, 'Go on, for I am strong and bold'¹

'Tis not enough from these to have departed'—that is, either from the Hypocrites or from the Circles already passed Virgil knew that one of the strongest temptations to a man of Dante's temper is to imagine that the mere climbing clear of such a sin as hypocrisy is enough, and he here reminds him that this negative virtue, this mere avoidance of gross infernal sins of either flesh or spirit, leaves a whole Paradise of goodness unclimbed and unknown. If we wish to know what he means by the 'longer stairway,' we must follow him up the seven Terraces of Mount Purgatory, purging away the seven deadly sins and winning the corresponding

¹ *Inf* xxiv 46-60

virtues Even when the Earthly Paradise on its summit is reached, with its four stars of the cardinal virtues of Prudence and Fortitude, Temperance and Justice, we shall still see shining far above us, sphere beyond sphere, the ten Heavens and the starry cluster of the Paradise of God—Faith, and Hope, and Love

CANTOS
XXIII 58—
XXIV 60
—

CHAPTER XXII

CIRCLE VIII —MALEBOLGE THE FRAUDULENT

Bolgia VII Thieves

CANTOS
XXIV 61-
XXV
—

AFTER their arduous climb out of the valley of the Hypocrites, the pilgrims found themselves on the bridge which spanned the seventh Moat, the prison in which Thieves receive their punishment. This bridge he describes as

rugged, narrow, and difficult,
And steeper far than that which went before

This can scarcely mean that thieving is a harder sin to avoid than hypocrisy, rather it is Dante's way of hinting how difficult it was in his day to protect oneself from thieves. As they climb the steep ridge, a voice as of one in anger came up to them, but indistinctly, as if unable to shape itself into articulate words. Bending down and peering into the Moat, Dante's 'living eyes' were unable to discern anything for the darkness—the element in which thieves love to lurk. Descending, therefore, the lower side of the bridge to one of the overhanging rocks, they saw a sight so full of horror that Dante declares the very memory of it made his blood run cold—a swarm of serpents of all kinds,

**The Valley of
the Serpents**

such as the great African deserts, Libya, Ethiopia, and that 'on the Red Sea,' could not equal In the midst of this venomous throng, naked souls were rushing about terror-stricken, 'without hope of hole or heliotrope'—heliotrope being a precious stone which was believed to render its possessor invisible, or to act as a charm against poisons They are the souls of Thieves now handcuffed for eternity; their arms are bound behind their backs with serpents, whose heads and tails are thrust through their loins and coiled into a knot in front

CANTOS
XXIV 61-
XXV
—

The description of these souls and their punishment is extremely difficult to understand the meaning is not unlike the throng of serpents themselves, writhing and twisting in confusion, and then gliding away so furtively and swiftly as to elude the eye. The probability is that Dante wishes to distinguish different kinds of thieves and their punishments. One soul, for example, is set on fire by a serpent and falls to the ground in ashes, only to be immediately restored to his human shape and again burnt up A second is fastened on by a horrible serpent—thing which so blends with the human form that the two melt into each other and change into a dreadful third something, which is at once both and neither A third, bitten by 'a small fiery serpent,' is transformed completely into the serpent's image, while the reptile reassumes the human shape Whether we can decide the meaning in detail or not, the general conception is clear enough. Dante wishes to indicate various modes and degrees in which the cunning of the serpent transforms the

CANTOS
XXIV. 81-
XXV
—

Vanni Fucci
of Pistoja

human soul into its own image Before inquiring more closely into the moral interpretation, it will be well to have the examples named by Dante clearly before our minds

The first is a certain Vanni Fucci of Pistoja,¹ a city hateful to Dante as the birthplace of the factions of Blacks and Whites which had proved the ruin of his earthly fortunes This man's life had been stained with many kinds of sin Politically he was a Black Guelph, and did not shrink from assassination in the service of his party This is why Dante wonders to find him here, 'for,' he says, 'once I saw him a man of blood and fury,' and therefore he might have been plunged in the River of Blood above, or higher still, in the Marsh of Styx among the Wrathful The reason for his being here is, as Fucci himself confesses, that he had committed a still more heinous sin, theft and sacrilege In the year 1293 he had robbed the church of San Giacopo in Pistoja of the treasures laid up in the sacristy, and the crime had been imputed to others, an innocent man, indeed, was put to death for it Now, the law of Divine justice in the *Inferno* is that when a man has been guilty of various forms of sin, his doom is decided by the most heinous of them, and it is one of the almost inevitable limitations of the poem that it cannot easily show the separate elements of penal suffering which the lesser sins contribute The punishment of this soul of many sins, however, does show something of these separate elements. As a thief, he is consumed by the serpents, but also, as a

¹ Inf xxiv 97-xxv 16

man of blood and violence, he is pursued by one of the Centaurs. As we saw in the Seventh Circle, the Centaurs are the ministers of Divine justice on the Violent in the River of Blood. This particular Centaur, however, was a thief, and is therefore transferred to this Moat. Properly speaking, indeed, he is not a Centaur at all, but a fire-breathing giant of Latin mythology. His name was Cacus, son of Vulcan and Medusa, and Dante was probably misled by Virgil's having called him 'half-man,' semi-human. The myth as given in the *Æneid*¹ is that Cacus lived in a cave on Mount Aventine, and that he stole the herds which Hercules had taken from Geryon. To conceal his theft, he dragged them backwards into his cave, but their lowing revealed their hiding-place to Hercules, who broke in and slew the monster. Dante regards him as one of the Centaurs, horse beneath and man above. On the brute part of him a swarm of serpents had fastened, while on his shoulders, at the back of the human head, lay a dragon with outspread wings, which set on fire every one he met—the reference being, of course, to the myth that he breathed flames. In short, in addition to his thievery, he represents that savage violence which devastates a country-side with fire, and it is as such that he here breaks into pursuit of Vanni Fucci, 'a man of blood and fury' like himself. The chief punishment, however, of Fucci is for his sacrilegious theft of the treasures of the church of St. James. A serpent darted at him, pierced him at the nape of the neck, and before one

CANTOS
XXIV 61-
XXV

Pursued by
the Centaur
Cacus

Bitten by a
Serpent

¹ *Æn* viii 193-267, *Inf* xxv 16-33

CANTOS
XXIV 61-
XXV
—

could write O or I, he took fire and dropped in sudden ashes to the ground. Then as suddenly as he fell he rose from the ashes, like the fabled phoenix, and assumed his former shape, but sighing and dazed, like a man recovering from possession by a demon or from a fit of epilepsy. These terrible transformations are his doom to all eternity, and as he watches them Dante cries out,

O Power of God! how severe it is,
That blows like these in vengeance showers down!¹

His Shame
and Self
Contempt

The meaning of the punishment may become clearer if we look for a moment at the strange mixture of emotions that swept through this wretched soul as he confronted Dante. However wicked in other directions, I think we are meant to understand that this man was not a thief by nature. He has at least the grace of 'a melancholy shame' in the presence of one who had known him on earth, and certainly his judgment of himself cannot be said to err upon the side of leniency.

'I rained from Tuscany
A short time since into this fierce gullet
Life bestial pleased me, and not human,
Even as the mule I was, I'm Vanni Fucci
Beast, and Pistoja was my worthy den
It pains me more that thou hast taught me
Amid the misery where thou seest me,
Than when I from the other life was taken.'²

'I am Vanni Fucci beast' sounds almost as if this were the name by which he was known in Pistoja; and the word 'mule' without doubt refers to the

¹ *Inf.* xxiv 119 120

² *Inf.* xxiv 122 135

fact that he was not born in wedlock He seems to feel that everything was wrong from the very first how could such as he turn out anything but the beast he was? He appears to have had his better moments of shame and self-reproach, and to have swung helplessly between sinning and vain remorse, that 'sorrow of the world' which 'worketh death.' Longfellow quotes a sonnet of his, 'pathetic,' he says, 'from its utter despair and self-reproach'.

CANTOS
XXIV 61-
XXV
—

'Shine not for me henceforth or Moon or Sun,
Nor let the Earth bring forth its fruits for me,
Let air, and fire, and water hostile be
For evermore, and me let fortune shun!
Let every star and planet, one by one,
Blast me, and brutify each sense! for see,
Ruined I cannot be more utterly,
Nor suffer greater pain than I have done!
Now will I live even as a savage wight,
Barefoot and naked, dwelling in desert place,
And he who will may do me wrong and spite,
I cannot suffer any worse disgrace
April or May can bring me no delight,
Nor anything my sense of shame efface,
Since I have lost the good I might have still,
Through little wit, and not of my own will'

This alternation of sin and remorse gives us, I think, the clue to the meaning of the punishment. Vanni Fucci seems to represent a class of men who lapse into thieving at intervals as by a kind of mania; when the mania passes and they come to themselves, they are utterly ashamed of their weakness, and, as Dante says, bewildered and dazed like men recovering from possession or an epileptic fit None the less they know that when the madness returns, they

CANTOS
XXIV 61-
XXV
—

will slip into ashes once more under its consuming fire. Something of this kind appears to be the symbolism of the eternal transformation from man to ashes, from ashes to man. This, indeed, is perhaps the reason why Dante is so careful to tell us that the serpent bit Fucci on the nape of the neck, 'there where the neck is knotted to the shoulders'—as if to hint that his sin was due, in part at least, to an affection of the brain. This is no mere fancy. When describing another class of Thieves he is equally careful to indicate the exact spot which the serpent wounds, and, as we shall see, this also has a peculiar significance.¹

His Malice and
Blasphemy

The shame which Vanni Fucci feels for his evil life is strangely mingled with malice and a singular baseness of blasphemy. At the ideal date of the poem, the year 1300, Dante belonged to the party of the Whites in Florence, and for the express purpose of humiliating and wounding him, Fucci foretells its defeat by his own party of the Blacks. In 1301 the Whites of Florence assisted in the driving out from Pistoja of the Black party. These banished Pistoians joined the Blacks of Florence and succeeded in driving out the Whites of that city. Finally, he foretells a great defeat of the Whites in a battle near Pistoja.

Mars draws a vapour up from Val di Magra,
Which is with turbid clouds enveloped round,
And with impetuous and bitter tempest
Over Campo Piceno shall be the battle,
Whence it shall suddenly rend the mist asunder,
So that every White shall thereby wounded be
And thus I've said that it may give thee pain.²

¹ See p. 352. Comp. *Inf.* xxx. 28-30.

² *Inf.* xxiv. 145-151.

The 'lightning vapour from Val di Magra' was the chief of the Black Guelphs, Moroello Malaspina, through whose territory the valley of the Magra or Macra ran. The battle referred to is either the capture of the fortress of Serravalle in 1302, or, as some think, the wresting from the Whites of Pistoja itself in 1305-6. Vanni Fucci has lost none of his old political bitterness, and is delighted to humiliate Dante by prophesying the downfall of his party.

But more malignant than this malice toward man is the blasphemy which he flings against God

At the conclusion of his words, the thief
 Lifted his hands aloft with both the figs,
 Crying 'Take that, God, for at thee I square them!'

The 'fig' was an obscene gesture of contempt, and to make it with both hands at God was the very climax of blasphemy. Probably his fury against God is due to His having thus exposed him to the sight of a political opponent like Dante. The poet declares that even the arrogant defiance of the blasphemer, Capaneus, was not so heinous

Through all the circles dark of Hell
 Spirit I saw not against God so proud,
 Not he who fell at Thebes down from the walls

From that moment, says Dante, the serpents became his friends, by taking on themselves the punishment of this great wickedness. One wound itself round Vanni Fucci's neck, as if to say, 'I will not thou speak more'; another bound his arms so firmly that the blasphemous hands could fling no further defiance against Heaven. He fled without a word, and a

CANTOS
 XXIV 61-
 XXV
 —

CANTOS
XXIV. 61-
XXV
—

The Five
Thieves of
Florence

Cianfa de'
Donati.

Agnello Bru-
nelleschi

moment later the Centaur, Cacus, rushed upon the scene, shouting in fury, 'Where is, where is the bitter wretch?'—and pursuer and pursued passed away into the darkness¹

At this point three souls suddenly appear in the valley with such thief-like stealthiness that neither Dante nor his Guide is aware of them until they cry, 'Who are ye?' One of them asks the others, 'Where can Cianfa have remained?' and Dante, hearing a Florentine name, laid his finger on his lips as a signal to Virgil to stand attentive. A scene follows so marvellous that the reader may well be slow to believe it, since he who saw it can scarcely allow it to himself. This Cianfa, it seems, had suddenly vanished, and his three companions are wondering what has become of him. His name naturally arrested Dante's attention, because he was a member of the noble Florentine family of the Donati, to which the poet himself was related by marriage. A moment before, Cianfa had borne the human form, but now he darts forward in the shape of a horrible six-footed serpent, which fastens itself on the companion who had missed him and asked where he was. This wretched soul was Agnello Brunelleschi of Florence, of whom the story goes that 'from his earliest childhood he would empty his father's or his mother's purse, then the drawers in the shops, and was given to thieving. Later on when he grew up he would get into other people's houses, and he would disguise himself as a poor man, and would fashion himself an old man's beard, and that is why

¹ *Inf* xxv 1-34

Dante represents him as transformed by the bite of that serpent, because he used thus to transform himself for the purpose of thieving.' It is on this soul that Cianfa Donati sprang in the form of a six-footed serpent. Fastening its front feet on his arms, its mid ones on his belly, and the hind pair on his thighs, it thrust its tail between his legs and bent it upward on the loins behind, while with its teeth it caught hold of both cheeks.

CANTOS
XXIV 61-
XXV
—

Ivy never was fastened by its roots
Unto a tree so, as this horrible monster
Around the other's limbs entwined its own

Then followed a marvellous and awful transmutation and blend of the two into a third something, such as human eyes never saw. Like wax, the man melted into the serpent, the serpent into the man. The colours mingled and changed as in burning paper when a brown colour runs up before the flame, and the white dies away. 'Neither one nor other seemed now what it was.' His two companions cried out in horror,

Cianfa and
Agnello blend
into a human
reptile

'O me, Agnello, how thou changest!
Behold already thou art neither two nor one'

And then the horrible blend of man and reptile with slow step passed away¹

The next instance is not a blend, but a complete transformation of man into serpent and serpent into man. While the other two thieves gazed after Agnello and Cianfa, 'a small fiery serpent livid and black as is a peppercorn,' and swift as a lizard flashing

Francesco
Guercio de'
Cavalcanti

¹ *Inf* xxv 35-78

CANTOS
XXIV. 61-
XXV
—

from hedge to hedge in the dog-days, darted at one of them, transfixing him in 'that part whereat is first received our nourishment.' Dante's carefulness in naming the exact spot can scarcely be without significance. Just as Vanni Fucci was bitten at the nape of the neck, perhaps to indicate that his sin was a kind of madness, a poisoning of the brain, so the piercing of this sinner in that part whereat our nourishment is first received, may be a hint that he had a hereditary tendency and predisposition to this sin. The little black serpent which flew upon him is identified in the last line of the Canto by the words,—'The other was he whom thou, Gaville, weepst' Gaville was a village in the upper Val d'Arno, where this Francesco Guercio de' Cavalcanti was slain. His kinsmen, the Cavalcanti, avenged the murder by almost exterminating its inhabitants, and this is why Dante says it weeps for him. The soul on whom he fastened is named Buoso, but nothing further is known of him. According to some commentators he was a certain Buoso degli Abati, while others identify him with that Buoso Donati who was so cleverly personated by Gianni Schicchi.¹ The little serpent after piercing him fell to the ground and lay. Each gazed at each in silence, the man stood motionless, but yawned as if sleep or fever had attacked him. He through his wound, the serpent through its mouth, began to smoke violently, and the two smokes commingled. Then began a transformation of each into the image of the other, so wonderful that Dante bids Lucan and Ovid be

Francesco
and Buoso
exchange
forms

Buoso

¹ *Inf* xxx 25-45 See pp 409-411

silent concerning the metamorphoses which they relate. The serpent's tail divided and became a man's two legs, the two legs of the man united and became a serpent's tail, the other members passed through similar changes and exchanges, described by Dante with a hideous realism which at once repels and fascinates. At last, while 'the smoke veiled them with a new colour,' the serpent rose upright and the man sank to the ground. Only his face now remained human. Soon it sharpened out into the form of the serpent's, the ears went in like a snail's horns, and the tongue grew forked. In converse fashion, the serpent head of the upright form grew into the shape of a man's, and the cloven tongue re-closed. The transformation being now complete, the smoke ceased, and the soul that had become a reptile fled hissing down the valley, pursued by the other, talking and spluttering, and crying over his shoulder to the only one of the gang who retained his proper shape,

CANTOS
XXIV 61-
XXV
—

'I'll have Buoso run,
As I have done, crawling, along this road'

The soul to whom he spoke was Puccio Sciancato (‘lame Puccio’) of the Galigai family of Florence, and the fact that he suffered no serpent transformation probably means that Dante regarded him as the least guilty of this band of Florentine thieves.¹

When we try to determine the moral significance of these horrible punishments, it is far from an

Symbolism
of the Meta-
morphoses

¹ *Inf* xxv 79-151. The passage is imitated by Milton in *Paradise Lost*, x 504-584, where Satan and his angels are transformed to serpents. See quotation, p 467

CANTOS
XXIV 61-
XXV

easy task, especially in their details. According to Plumptre, it is questionable whether they have any great significance at all 'One ventures to think,' he says, 'that at this point the quick spontaneous imagination of the poet began for a while to flag. By way of compensation he falls back upon reminiscences of his two favourite poets, Lucan and Ovid, and deliberately endeavours to surpass them in the strangeness and elaborateness of his description. His first picture is, as it were, a *replica* of Lucan's description of the Libyan desert (ix 706-721), in which he exhausts the whole vocabulary of serpent classification' Now Dante certainly had Lucan and Ovid in mind, for, as we have seen, he expressly names them, he even appears to take a strange and almost amusing pride in surpassing them in horrors. Nevertheless, it is simply incredible that he wrote these dreadful Cantos merely or chiefly to outdo two heathen poets. In every Circle and Bolgia hitherto we have found him aiming at some real and natural correspondence between sin and punishment, and it would be strange if the correspondence failed here.

Thieves—a
blend of Man
and Serpent

The most general idea is that which lies on the very surface, namely, that Thieves are a combination of man and serpent, like Geryon, the Guardian of this whole Circle of Fraud. The symbolism of the serpent is obvious enough lurking, thief-like, among the grass and stones, creeping into houses by whatever hole it can find, and wounding its victim when he has no suspicion of its presence. As on earth these souls transformed themselves by various disguises for their thievish ends from man

to serpent, from serpent to man, so now their doom is that this transformation goes on for ever: they have created in themselves an eternal duplicity of nature. Still further, the serpent is the enemy of all mankind; and therefore in this valley of serpent-thieves Dante sets before us the kind of world which would exist were all bonds of common honesty dissolved—the social confusion and insecurity and fear, no man knowing when he would be attacked by some serpent which might turn out to be one of his own comrades. It is probably for reasons such as these that Dante sets this sin so far down in Hell, below Simony and Barratry, and far below Robbery. The first two, evil as they are, do not create the same sense of insecurity and social confusion, and Robbery is, by comparison, an open and honest crime. This is the reason, too, why Dante differs from Aquinas in his estimate of these two sins. ‘Robbery is a more grievous sin than theft,’ Aquinas declares, ‘because violence is more directly opposed to the will than ignorance. There is also another reason because by robbery not only is loss inflicted on another in his property, but there is also something of personal insult or injury enacted.’¹ The standards applied are different. Aquinas judges by the amount of violence used, Dante by the amount of fraud. The open highwayman gives his fellows a fair chance of defending themselves, but theft is

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—

¹ *Summa*, II-II q. lxvi a. 9. Wicksteed traces his severity to this sin to another cause. ‘His own writings show that the maintenance of peace was his idea of the supreme function of Government. The extreme severity of his judgments upon thieving and upon false coinage is characteristic of the citizen of the greatest commercial city of the world.’

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—

a snake in the grass, far more dangerous to mankind, because it is a secret and underhand attack on the institution of private property, without which society cannot exist

The Contagion
of Dishonesty

Perhaps, however, the most arresting thing about this punishment is the way in which these Thieves, when they have nothing else to take, steal one another's very form and identity. The transformations are more than a mere play of meaningless fancy. They symbolize, as Ruskin points out, the contagious power of dishonesty, the way in which a thief can steal away a man's better nature, initiate him into the secret of his fraud, infuse his poison into him, and change him into a serpent like himself. 'There is not in all the *Inferno* quite so studied a piece of descriptive work as Dante's relation of the infection of one cursed soul of this crew by another. They change alternately into the forms of men and serpents, each biting the other into this change'.¹ Obviously this infectious power of thievery is represented as working in different forms and degrees, and attempts have been made to distinguish various kinds of thieves. For example, Vanni Fucci, it is said, represents sacrilegious theft, which respects neither God nor His Church, Cianfa and Agnello were probably officials of Florence who thieved from the State, while Buoso, Francesco, and Puccio are regarded as thieves of private property. There may be some truth in this division, but the only part of it which is quite certain is the sacrilege of Fucci. One is inclined to

¹ *Fors Clavigera*, Letter lxxii

suggest that the distinction which Dante intends to draw between different species of Thieves depends rather on the manner and degree in which they are infected by others. We may distinguish four classes Vanni Fucci is a sort of kleptomaniac—the madness attacks his head, burns him to ashes, and when he comes to himself he is like a man recovering from epilepsy or possession. Cianfa and Agnello are men who blend into one another like wax, forming a new and perfect combination and unity of evil, which is impossible to either of them apart: they represent the most complete harmony and identification of two evil natures, the one being the tempter, the other the tempted Buoso and Cavalcanti are also tempter and tempted, but there is neither harmony nor identification. Alternately they turn each other into serpents, but when one is a serpent the other is a man, and hates the tempter who infected him with his poison And finally we have Puccio Sciancato, the only soul who underwent no loss of his proper form evidently Dante believed that it was possible for a man to be a thief without suffering the loss of his last possession—his very humanity

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Four Classes
of Thieves.

In the *Fors Clavigera* Letter quoted above, Ruskin says sarcastically that in our day these 'Thieves by Fraud' are 'brilliantly represented by the men who covet their neighbours' goods and take them in any way they think safe, by high finance, sham companies, cheap goods, or any other of our popular modern ways.' In similar fashion, Dante saw in this Moat a picture of the moral state of his time and country

Prevalence of
the Sin in
Florence

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—

Of the six souls named, all are Tuscan, one a native of Pistoja, the remaining five of Florence. Of the former city he says it was 'a worthy den' of such a 'beast' as Vanni Fucci—thief, murderer, blasphemer, and wonders why it does not 'resolve to burn itself to ashes,' as he was burnt. But the heaviest condemnation falls on his own city. Ironically he congratulates it on being as famous in Hell as throughout the earth

Rejoice, O Florence, since thou art so great
That over land and sea thou beatest thy wings,
And throughout Hell thy name is spread abroad !
Among the thieves I found five such
Thy citizens, whence shame comes unto me,
And thou thereby to no great honour risest ¹

It may be said, of course, that this is only a savage vindictive blow aimed by Dante at the city which banished him on a charge of bairatry, but making allowance for some not unnatural personal feeling, there is obviously something far nobler. His irony has a central core of sorrow—sorrow such as wrung tears from the prophets of Israel, foreseeing in the general corruption of the nation their country's doom. He seems to have had specially before his mind one line of Isaiah in his lament over the fall of 'the faithful city' 'Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves' For this is the point of the words, 'Among the thieves I found five such thy citizens.' 'Five *such*' not one of them from the scum of the people, but every man sprung from the noblest families in Florence. What hope was

¹ *Inf* xxv. 1-6

there for a city whose very princes were thieves and companions of thieves? He had had sad dreams of it—morning dreams which come true

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But if near the morning truth is dreamed of,
Feel shalt thou in a little time from now
What Prato, if none other, craves for thee.¹

Prato can scarcely be the city of that name, since it was in general friendly to Florence. The reference is much more likely to be to Cardinal Niccolò da Prato, who was sent by Benedict XI in the spring of 1304 to make peace between the Florentine Guelphs and Ghibellines. Failing in his mission, he departed on the 4th of June, leaving the city under an interdict and its inhabitants excommunicated. Within a week, on the 10th, a great fire, originated by a dissolute priest, burnt down more than seven-hundred houses, towers, and palaces—'in short,' says Villani, 'all the marrow and yolk and the most precious places of the city. The loss of stores, and of treasure, and of merchandise was infinite, forasmuch as in those places were almost all the merchandise and precious things of Florence, and that which was not burnt was robbed by highwaymen as it was being carried away, the city being continually at war in divers places, wherefore many companies, and clans, and families were ruined and brought to poverty by the said fires and robberies.' Villani says it was commonly held that this and other adversities and perils which befell Florence about this time were due to the interdict laid on the city by the Cardinal da Prato.² As he thinks of all this,

¹ *Inf* xxvi 7 9

² *Villani*, viii 71

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XXV
—

Dante could almost wish that the doom had already fallen, since fall it must, knowing that with advancing years he will find harder to bear the ruin of the city which he loved perhaps the more because of his unjust exile from her.

And if it already were, 'twere not too soon,
Would that it were, seeing it needs must be,
For it will weigh me down the more I age¹

¹ *Inf* XXXI 10 12

CHAPTER XXIII

CIRCLE VIII.—MALEBOLGE ' THE FRAUDULENT

Bolgia VIII Evil Counsellors

THE eighth Moat, to which we now come, is that of
Evil Counsellors From the broken ledge to which
they had descended to see into the dark valley of
the Thieves, the two pilgrims climb back to the cliff
which forms the next bridge It is not easy walk-
ing Virgil has to draw Dante up, and 'the foot
without the hand sped not' When they reach the
highest point of the bridge, Dante looks down and
compares the sight to the swarm of fireflies which
the Italian peasant sees in the darkening valley
below, as he rests on a summer evening on the hill-
side after his day's work is done In the same way
this infernal valley twinkled with innumerable little
flames, and every flame concealed a human soul, or,
as Dante expresses it,

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—

The Valley of
the Fireflies.

Not one reveals the theft,
And every flame a sinner steals away

Just as to Elsha watching the translation of his
master, there came a moment when the forms of
Elijah and horses and chariots vanished, leaving
nothing visible save 'the flame alone, even as a little

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—

cloud ascending up,' so here the soul was completely hidden by the fire. Although Dante puts this in the form of a simile, there can be little doubt that this particular comparison is chosen for the sake of the contrast it involves. By his faithful and fearless warnings to King Ahab, Eljah is the type of a good counsellor, and his reward is a fiery triumph heavenward. The souls in this Moat are Evil Counsellors, and their doom is an eternal imprisonment within a narrow tongue of fire in the heart of Hell.¹

Dante's Fear
of this Sin

As he looked at these flamelets, Dante tells us there fell on him a certain sadness, and a solemn sense of responsibility for the use of his genius. These were souls who had perished through the perversion of the great intellectual powers God had given them, and he trembled as he felt within himself the same danger of intellectual perdition. To him even as to them, he knew that God had given great powers of mind, and it is far from improbable that he had frequently known the temptation to which they had yielded. In the troubled politics of his time there must have come many opportunities of using his great intellect for crafty purposes, to bend his fellowmen to his own ends or those of his party. Perhaps Dante was too imperious a soul to be in any real danger of stooping to win men by craft and policy—as witness his breaking away from the Ghibellines and forming a party by himself,² nevertheless, in the presence of these lost minds to which he felt himself akin, he is so impressed with the possibility of a similar perdition that he reins in those

¹ *Inf* xxvi 25-42

² *Par* xvii 61-69

high intellectual powers which some 'good star or better thing,' such as the grace of God, perchance had given him

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—

Then sorrowed I, and sorrow now again,
When I direct my mind to what I saw,
And more my genius curb than I am wont,
That it may run not unless virtue guide it,
So that if a good star or better thing
Have given me good, I may myself not grudge it

It is certainly to this temptation he refers when he tells us that he almost fell into the valley. After climbing on hands and feet to the arch of the bridge, he stood erect to look down, and had he not caught one of the rocks, he says he would have gone over without a push. It sounds like the recollection of some critical moment when he almost fell into that crafty use of his intellectual powers which would have carried him down to 'this blind world'¹

Two examples of Evil Counsellors are given, ^{Ulysses and Diomed} chosen, as is Dante's custom, from heathen and Christian times. The heathen instance is Ulysses and Diomed, who are imprisoned together in one flame which parts at the top into a double tongue, the greater of which is Ulysses. These two in their earthly life had been accomplices in many a fraud, three of which are specially named, probably because of their connection with the founding of Rome: 'the ambush of the horse' by which Troy was taken and 'the noble seed of the Romans' driven forth; the craft by which they drew Achilles to the

¹ *Inf.* xxvi 16-24, 43-45

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—

war, leaving Deidameia to die of grief; and the theft of the Palladium, the famous statue of Pallas Athene, on which the safety of Troy hung.¹ Ulysses was more the mind that planned, Diomed more the hand that executed; they are, therefore, imprisoned in the same flame, and this is an increase of their torment. Dante compares the two horns into which their flame parted to those which rose from the funeral pyre of Eteocles and Polynices. These two brothers quarrelled over the succession to the throne of their father, Œdipus of Thebes, and slew each other in the war of the Seven against Thebes which followed. Even death could not quench their hatred: the very flames which consumed their bodies divided and refused to mingle.² By comparing the cloven flame of Ulysses and Diomed to their funeral pyre, Dante means that they were torn by a similar hatred, men who helped to ruin each other here are not likely to waste much love on one another there. Dante is most anxious to speak with 'the horned flame,' and Virgil praises him for the wish; but at the same time warns him to refrain from addressing them, lest they should disdain to answer because they were Greeks. Many reasons have been suggested for this, such as their old Greek scorn of 'barbarians', or that speech with men of the ancient world is more appropriately left to Virgil, while Dante converses with moderns. The likelier reason here is that Dante is a descendant of their ancient Trojan enemies, and Virgil might be regarded as sprung from another stock, since his native city was

¹ *Æn* ii 162-170

² Statius, *Thebaid*, xii 431

founded by Manto, the Theban prophetess. At all events, Virgil ventures to address them, adjuring them by the fame he had given them in his 'lofty verses,' to say where Ulysses in his wide wanderings had gone away to die.

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—

The question is very characteristic of Dante. His imagination seems to have taken a weird delight in constructing an ideal ending of life for men and women whose death was surrounded with mystery. Count Ugolino in the Tower of Famine, and Buonconte da Montefeltro's lonely death in the valley of the Arno, will readily occur to the reader. Where and how the Great Wanderer met his end had been left untold by the Homeric legends. The only hint given in the *Odyssey* is the prophecy of Tiresias when Ulysses meets him among the souls of dead heroes in the under-world 'And from the sea shall thine own death come, the gentlest death that may be, which shall end thee foredone with smooth old age.' Although Dante had no direct acquaintance with Homer, some hint of this death of Ulysses from the sea may have reached him through translations of Greek works, and it has been suggested that his imagination wrought the story of the wild adventure 'out of the Genoese voyages of discovery in search of a Western continent, which resulted ultimately in the discovery of America, but which up to this time had proved fruitless. One such expedition left in 1291, and was never heard of again. With this general idea Dante may have combined the well-known fable, repeated by the crusaders and others, of the Mountain of Loadstone by which ships

The Passing of
Ulysses

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—
Tennyson's
'Ulysses'

were attracted and dashed to pieces '¹ The story as told by 'the greater horn of the ancient flame' is of so vivid an interest that it must be given in full. There can be no doubt that Tennyson's Ulysses is a paraphrase—splendid, no doubt, but still a paraphrase—of this passage. There is the same impatience of dull domestic tameness; the same determination to 'drink life to the lees', the same scorn of hoarding the remnant of the years, and the same high resolve

'to follow knowledge like a sinking star
Beyond the utmost bounds of human thought'

The translation given is Longfellow's

'When I

From Circe had departed, who concealed me
More than a year there near unto Gaeta,
Or ever yet Æneas named it so,²
Nor fondness for my son, nor reverence
For my old father, nor the due affection
Which joyous should have made Penelope,
Could overcome within me the desire
I had to be experienced of the world,
And of the vice and virtue of mankind,
But I put forth on the high open sea
With one sole ship, and that small company
By which I never had deserted been
Both of the shores I saw as far as Spain,
Far as Morocco, and the isle of Sardes,
And the others which that sea bathes round about
I and my company were old and slow
When at that narrow passage we arrived
Where Hercules his landmarks set as signals,

¹ Moore, *Studies in Dante* (1st series), 264 n

² A town in the north of Campania, named by Æneas after his nurse, Caieta (*Æn* vii 14)

That man no farther onward should adventure.
 On the right hand behind me I left Seville,
 And on the other already had left Ceuta
 "O brothers, who amid a hundred thousand
 Perils," I said, "have come unto the West,
 To this so inconsiderable a vigil
 Which is remaining of your senses still,
 Be ye unwilling to deny the knowledge,
 Following the sun, of the unpeopled world
 Consider ye the seed from which ye sprang,
 Ye were not made to live like unto brutes,
 But for pursuit of virtue and of knowledge "
 So eager did I render my companions,
 With this brief exhortation, for the voyage,
 That then I hardly could have held them back
 And having turned our stern unto the morning,
 We of the oars made wings for our mad flight,
 Evermore gaining on the larboard side,
 Already all the stars of the other pole
 The night beheld, and ours so very low
 It did not rise above the ocean floor
 Five times rekindled and as many quenched
 Had been the splendour underneath the moon,
 Since we had entered into the deep pass,
 When there appeared to us a mountain, dim
 From distance, and it seemed to me so high
 As I had never any one beheld
 Joyful were we, and soon it turned to weeping,
 For out of the new land a whirlwind rose,
 And smote upon the fore part of the ship
 Three times it made it whirl with all the waters,
 At the fourth time it made the stern uplift,
 And the prow downward go, as pleased Another,
 Until the sea above us closed again '1

¹ *Inf* xxvi 90-142 Contrast Plato's account of Ulysses in the vision of Er, *Rep* x 614-621 After one thousand years in Hades the souls are brought into a meadow to choose their lots before their rebirth into another life on earth 'There came also the soul of Odysseus, having yet to make a choice, and his lot happened to be the last of them all Now the recollection of former toils had disenchanted him of ambition,

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—

'Another' is God, but the holy name is never mentioned in Hell save by Vanni Fucci in blasphemy. If, as is probable, the great mountain which they sight after their five months' voyage is Mount Purgatory, which, according to Dante, rises at the exact antipodes of Jerusalem, the storm which 'rose from the new land' has a symbolic meaning. Being heathens, it was impossible that they should land on Mount Purgatory, since only those who are on the way to Paradise can gain a footing on its shores.

It is an interesting question whether this passage is anything more than a magnificent excrescence on the general subject. 'The story of Ulysses' last voyage and death,' writes a recent commentator, 'is a digression, like that of the foundation of Mantua in *Inf* xx, for it bears no relation to the subject of the *Inferno*. Both of these serve, however, to give variety, and to lighten the uniformity of gloom.'¹ It is difficult to believe that Dante thus indulges himself in a mere poetic device to relieve the strain, or that he is carried away by his imaginative delight in 'one crowded hour of glorious life'. Is it not probable that this wild adventure is narrated as the last piece of evil counsel of which Ulysses was guilty? The Pillars of Hercules on each side of the Strait of Gibraltar were set as a sign and landmark of the limits of the habitable world, beyond which it may have been regarded as an impiety to sail. By his

and he went about for a considerable time in search of the life of a private man who had no cares, he had some difficulty in finding this, which was lying about and had been neglected by everybody else, and when he saw it, he said that he would have done the same had he been first instead of last, and that he was delighted at his choice.

¹ Rev. H. F. Tozer's *English Commentary*, p. 142.

evil counsel Ulysses so inflamed his companions that he could scarcely have restrained them had he wished. Dante pictures him here as a soul insatiable in its hunger for new experiences of human vice and virtue, but insatiable only that he may the more craftily play upon the weaknesses of mankind

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—

The point of special moral interest, however, is the contrast drawn between Ulysses as he was and as he is: on earth, scorning the Pillars of his ancient world, and boldly launching forth into 'wild sea-liberties', in this Moat, imprisoned to all eternity within this narrow fire-fly flame. It cannot be an accident that Dante represents the great world-wandering soul as thus 'cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd'. The meaning must lie somewhere in the nature of the sin. We think of a soul like Ulysses as great and boundless in its insatiable craving for new experiences, its wide and varied knowledge of the world, and its skill in playing on the vices and virtues of mankind. Dante will have us understand that it is far otherwise. Ulysses could say, in Tennyson's words,

'Much have I seen and known, cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honoured of them all',

nevertheless the craftiness in which he lived closed in like fate around his soul, until at last all his vast knowledge of men is narrowed down to 'this blind world,' this flame no bigger than a firefly, and this tormenting companionship with his accomplice in cunning. Thus it is that 'He taketh the wise in their own craftiness'

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—
Guido, Count
of Montefeltro

Of even greater interest in some ways is the Christian example of an evil counsellor. When Ulysses was departing with Virgil's leave, the attention of the pilgrims was arrested by the confused sound which issued from the top of another of the flames, and which at last changed into an articulate voice. The soul within had overheard Virgil using Lombard speech when he said to Ulysses 'Now go thy way, no more I urge thee,' and therefore begged to know what events were happening in 'that sweet Latian land' from which he had fallen into 'this blind world'. The Latin or Latian land is Italy, and in particular the province of Romagna from which he had come. The thing he wishes most to know is whether the Romagnuoli have peace or war. It was a natural question for one who for many years had been the greatest soldier of the province, and had held in his hands the innumerable threads of its struggles, plots, and factions. Virgil bids Dante reply, because 'this one is a Latian', whereupon the poet answers that at the moment of open war there was none, but that in the bosoms of the tyrant-lords of Romagna there never is nor was wanting the stuff of which war is made. After giving him an account of the present state of Ravenna, Rimini, and other towns of the province, Dante, who sees only the flame and not the soul inside, begs him to say who he is, that his name 'may hold front there in the world'.¹ The sinner

¹ *Inf* xviii 4-54. The towns are described for the most part by the coats of arms of their tyrant-lords. 'Ravenna is still, as it has been for years past, under the eagle of the Polenta family, which now also broods over Cervia (vv 40-42), Forlì is under the claws of the green

replies that if he thought he were speaking to one who would return to the world, he would tell him nothing, but since return is impossible he can answer 'without fear of infamy' In the upper Circles the souls do not shrink from this remembrance upon earth, but in these shameful depths of Fraud and Treachery it would be a relief to be forgotten Besides, this soul had left behind him on earth a name so great and honoured that Dante himself, in the *Convito* (iv. 28), speaks of him as 'our most noble Latian', and if he thought that the sin he was about to confess was unknown on earth, we can understand why he shrank from ruining his reputation by revealing it

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He then tells Dante the strange story of his life—the story of a soul lost within sight of Heaven's gate, a ship wrecked at the harbour's mouth His name—which, however, he is careful not to speak—was Guido, Count of Montefeltro, a district, as he says, 'between Urbino and the yoke from which the Tiber bursts' He was Captain of the Ghibellines in Romagna, and more than once had fought against the Pope and been excommunicated. At last, in old age, when, as he says,

Story of
Guido's Sin

'every one ought
To lower sails and gather in the ropes,'

he made his peace with the Church, repented, confessed, and joined the Franciscan Order From the

hon of the Ordelaffi (vv 43-45), Rimini is under the Old and Young Mastiffs (the Malatesta, vv 46-48), Faenza and Imola are under the lion-cub of Maghinardo Paganò (vv 49-51), and Cesena alternates between a state of tyranny and freedom (vv 52-54)'—Toynbee's *Dictionary*, 'Romagna'

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XXVII

sequel we might suspect that he was of the number of those described by Milton,

' who, to be sure of Paradise,
Dying put on the weeds of Dominic,
Or in Franciscan think to pass disguised ' ¹

Dante, however, seems to give him full credit for sincerity in his repentance, as we have seen he calls him 'our most noble Latian,' and praises him for lowering the sails of his worldly affairs as he drew near to the port of death ² Benvenuto da Imola says that he was often seen publicly begging his bread in Ancona, where he died and was buried, and that he had heard many things of him which gave good hope of his salvation. Count Guido's own account of himself here is far less flattering than the reputation which he left behind on earth

' My deeds
Were not those of a lion, but a fox
The cunning wiles and covert ways
I knew them all, and practised so their art,
That to the ends of the earth the sound went forth.' ³

His Evil
Counsel to
Boniface

This reputation for cunning proved in the end his eternal undoing. His repentance and confession would have availed for his salvation, had not Boniface VIII 'brought him back to his first sins' That

¹ *Par. Lost*, iii 478-480

² *Conv.* iv 28

³ *Inf.* xviii 74-78. Comp. Machiavelli's *Prince*, chap. xviii, *Whether princes ought to be faithful to their engagements*. 'Now as a prince must learn how to act the part of a beast sometimes, he should make the fox and the lion his patterns. From the fox, a prince will learn dexterity in avoiding snares, and from the lion, how to employ his strength to keep the wolves in awe. But they who entirely rely upon the lion's strength, will not always meet with success: in other words, a prudent prince cannot and ought not to keep his word, except when he can do so without injury to himself, or when the circumstances under which he contracted the engagement still exist.'

'Prince of the new Pharisees' sought the advice of so crafty a fox under the following circumstances. In the year 1297 the Pope was carrying on a war, not, as Guido sarcastically says, against Saracens or Jews, but against Christians—the great rival house of the Colonnas. Two Cardinals of this family, being excommunicated by Boniface and their palaces in Rome destroyed, retired to their stronghold of Palestrina. Foiled and furious at his inability to capture this place, the Pope summoned the crafty old soldier-monk from his cloister to advise him how to raze it to the ground. At first Guido kept silent, for Boniface seemed delirious with 'the fever of his pride', but on being promised absolution by anticipation, he gave the evil counsel which sank him to this Moat.

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—

" " Father, since thou wastest me
Of that sin into which I now must fall,
The promise long with the fulfilment short,
Will make thee triumph in thy lofty seat " "

Following this advice, Boniface promised the Cardinals that if they submitted, he would grant them pardon and restore their possessions, his fulfilment was 'short' enough—he levelled Palestrina with the ground. Six years later the Colonnas took their revenge for this treachery by the famous outrage on Boniface at Anagni, and it is perhaps in sarcastic allusion to this that Guido promises he will 'triumph in his lofty seat' by following his advice.¹

¹ *Purg* xv 86 90. For a defence of Boniface, see Father Bowden's Preface to Hettinger, p. xiii. Milman says of him 'He was hardly dead when the epitaph was proclaimed to the unprotesting Christian world. He came in like a fox, he ruled like a lion, and he died like a dog.'

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The Black
Cherub and
St Francis

It was only in death that Count Guido awoke from the delusion of salvation with which the Papal pardon had lulled him to perdition. Then St Francis came, according to the belief of the time, to claim his soul as one of his Cordeliers, but was waved away by 'one of the Black Cherubim'. The passage is too vigorous to be left unquoted

'Francis came afterwards, when I was dead,
For me, but one of the Black Cherubim
Said to him "Take him not, do me no wrong,
He must come down amongst my menials,
Because he gave the fraudulent advice,
From which time forth I have been at his hair
For who repents not cannot be absolved,
Nor can one repent and will at once,
Because of the contradiction which consents not "
O miserable me! how I did waken up
When he seized on me, saying to me "Perchance
Thou didst not think that I was a logician!"
He bore me unto Minos, who entwined
Eight times his tail about his stubborn back,
And, after he had bitten it in great fury,
Said "This is a sinner of the thievish fire",
Wherefore, here where thou seest, am I lost,
And vested thus in going I bemoan me'¹

It was an axiom with Dante that there could be no salvation without repentance, and it was morally impossible for Guido in the one same act of will to resolve to commit a sin and to repent of it. In the *De Monarchia* he argues against the unlimited power of the Pope to grant absolution. When it is said, 'whatsoever thou shalt bind,' if the 'whatsoever' is

¹ *Inf.* xxvii 112-120 'The thievish fire' refers to xxvi 41-42

Not one shows the theft,
And every flame a sinner steals away

to be taken in an absolute sense, 'then,' says Dante, 'he might even absolve me when impenitent, which God Himself cannot do'¹

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A number of writers regard the whole of this story as one of those calumnies which grew up out of the mutual recriminations of Guelphs and Ghibellines, and some declare it rests upon the evidence of no contemporary writer. As a matter of fact, the story is told very much as Dante tells it in Villani's *Chronicle* (viii. 23), and as Villani was a Guelph, we may suppose that he would not accept without evidence a story so damaging to the character of the Pope. If it is a calumny invented by Dante, he would almost deserve a separate Circle for himself. It is inconceivable that in the very act of condemning one sin of the tongue, he should deliberately commit another and worse—slander, and slander too of the defenceless dead. The fact that he praises 'our most noble Latian' in the *Convito* for lowering his sails in old age, proves nothing—it is surely no inconsistency to praise a man for one act, while condemning him for another. Moreover, it is quite possible that the story of this fraudulent counsel was unknown to Dante at the time when he wrote the eulogistic passage in the *Convito*.

Was Guido
guilty?

The mention of 'one of the Black Cherubim' shows the extraordinary exactness and care with which Dante carries out the symbolism of his poem. The Cherubim are the eighth Order of Angels in the Heavenly Hierarchy, and doubtless that is why they are mentioned in this eighth Bolgia of this eighth

significance of
'the Black
Cherubim'

¹ *De Mon.* iii 8

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Circle. But the reason goes much deeper. The sin punished in this Moat is the abuse and perversion of great intellectual powers to fraudulent ends. Now, the Cherubim represent the intellectual powers in their highest created form—they are the Angels that excel in knowledge,¹ and therefore Dante represents those who fell from this Order and became Black Cherubim, as waiting for the souls of men whose sin is intellectual like their own. This too is probably the reason why the fiend says that ever since Count Guido gave the fraudulent counsel, he had been 'at his hair'—his hand, as it were, clutching fast the head and brain which the sinner's own craftiness had delivered into his power.

Guido's son,
Buonconte, in
Purgatory

It is impossible to pass by the awful and mysterious contrast which Dante draws between the fate of Guido and that of his son Buonconte, whom he meets shortly after on the lower slopes of Mount Purgatory. The one is a soul shipwrecked at the very harbour's mouth, the other is a soul saved even when it seemed to have struck and gone to pieces on the rocks of perdition. Buonconte was the leader of the Aretines at the battle of Campaldino in 1289, at which it is thought Dante himself was present. Buonconte was slain, but his body was never found, and out of this mysterious disappearance the poet, after his manner, constructs an ideal ending of his life, as we have just seen him do for Ulysses. After the defeat

¹ Comp. *Par.* xi. 37-39, where St. Francis is compared to Seraphim, burning with love, and St. Dominic to Cherubim, shining with the light of wisdom.

The one was all seraphical in ardour
The other by his wisdom was on earth
A splendour of cherubic light

of his forces, he fled wounded in the throat across the plain to the point where the Archiano joins the Arno, and there, murmuring the name of Mary, fainted from loss of blood and died. And just as over his father's soul the powers of good and evil contended for possession, so, but with opposite issue, they fought for his. It was claimed and kept by God's angel, to the furious anger and chagrin of the demon who had long made sure of it. Enraged that for 'one poor little tear' he was thus cheated of the immortal soul, he wreaked his vengeance on the mortal dust. Gathering the storm-clouds among the mountains, he swept the body down the flood of the Arno, dashing it furiously along, and finally burying it in the mud at the bottom of the river, so that it was never found. In this deliberately contrasted picture of father and son, Dante seems to have had two aims in view. In the first place, he wished to show the tragic criticalness of human fate: how slight the cause which may make the balance dip to Hell or rise to Heaven—the father lost when all seems safe, the son saved when all seems lost. In the *Paradiso* he uses the thought to check rash judgments of our fellowmen

'Nor yet shall people be too confident
In judging, even as he who counteth
The corn in field ere ever it be ripe,
For I have seen all winter long the thorn
First show itself intractable and fierce,
And after bear the rose upon its top,
And I have seen a ship direct and swift
Run o'er the sea throughout its course entire,
To perish at the harbour's mouth at last.'¹

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¹ *Purg.* v. 85-120, *Par.* xiii. 130-138

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In the next place, Dante evidently meant to point out some of the limits of the Church's power in salvation. On the one hand, even the pardon of a Pope is powerless to save a deliberate sinner like Guido from Hell without repentance. God Himself could not do it, much less His Vicar. On the other hand, Buonconte's salvation proved that the pardon did not depend on the Church, or the intervention of sacraments, or priestly absolution without confession or shrift, viaticum or extreme unction, there among the lonely hills the dying sinner's one cry of penitence saved him in the very article of death. So free of bondage even to the appointed means is the grace of God.

Punishment of
Evil Counsel

Turning now to the punishment of this sin of Fraudulent Counsel, we find it to be threefold. In the first place, each flame is in the appropriate form of a tongue,¹ the instrument of the sin, and this tongue completely folds in the soul, or, to use the poet's significant words,

The Tongue
'steals' the
Soul

*Not one reveals the theft,
And every flame a sinner steals away*

The obvious meaning is that the tongue when used for the purpose of giving cunning and fraudulent counsel conceals a man's soul. 'Speech,' says a sarcastic divine of the seventeenth century, 'was given to the ordinary sort of men whereby to communicate their mind, but to wise men whereby to conceal it.' Dante denies the wisdom of such concealment. When a man lives a life of crafty speech which hides his soul, the true thought and purpose

¹ *Inf.* xxvi 89

in the background, the time comes when he can use the gift of language for no other end. The power of sincere and transparent speech is lost, and the man cannot reveal himself even if he would. His craftiness closes round him like these tongues of fire, and he becomes for ever invisible to his fellowmen. Nay, the word 'steals' which Dante uses, hints at a more terrible punishment still—the theft and shrinkage and decay of the soul itself, until it grows so small that it can be confined within the narrow flame of a firefly. The soul of Ulysses himself, full as it is of all knowledge of the world, is so stolen from him by 'the thievish fire' of his own crafty tongue that it dwindles down at last to a mere spark.

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In the second place, these sinners, like the Suicides, have great difficulty in speaking at all. The tongue of fire which concealed Ulysses began by tossing itself and murmuring like a flame that struggles with the wind. Similarly when Count Guido tried to speak, at first nothing came but a confused sound the words, seeking for an outlet, were converted into the flame's own language, the flickering murmur which it makes in the air. The idea is partly that the abuse of the power of speech is punished by the withdrawal of it. But also it is part of the punishment already spoken of, the concealment of the soul. It cannot utter and reveal itself by the abuse of it, the tongue has closed in round the soul and refuses to express its thoughts.¹

Finally, each tongue is a tongue of fire. The idea was 'The tongue is a fire' probably suggested by the words of St James (iii 6)

¹ *Inf.* xxvi 85-90, xxvii 4-15

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'The tongue is a fire the world of iniquity among our members is the tongue, which defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the wheel of nature (in the Vulgate, *rotam naturæ nostræ*, the wheel of our birth), and is set on fire by hell' By this fire, doubtless, Dante meant to indicate the element of pain

' Within the fires the spirits are,
Each swathes himself with that wherewith he burns '1

It is one of Dante's most familiar thoughts. As we have seen, the sin of this Bolgia is primarily one of the intellect, and 'the good of the intellect' is the knowledge of God which is 'the true beatitude' of every human soul. The souls of these Evil Counselors have foregone this good of the intellect by turning their great powers of mind away from God who is their fulfilment and bliss, to the wisdom of the world. According to Dante, whenever this perversion of the intellect from God takes place in any form, it involves the soul in an agony as of fire: the souls of Heretics, for example, are imprisoned in burning tombs. We shall better understand the doom of the spirits in 'this blind world' if we contrast it with the blessedness of those intellects that made God their end. Dante sets them in the Heaven of the Sun in Paradise²—great theologians and teachers like Aquinas and Bonaventura. Their souls too are invisible, enclosed in bright flames, but with a world of difference. The flames are not their prison, but their freedom. If they are concealed, it

Contrast to
Good Coun-
sellors

¹ *Inf.* xxvi. 47

² *Par.* x. xiv

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is because they have been glad to lose themselves in the light of God. In the joy of this self-forgetfulness in Him, they sing and move in 'choral starry dance.' Instead of twinkling as fireflies in the dark valley of a 'blind world,' they shine as white stars, visible even against the bright background of the Sun, which is the sensible image of God. For to these Counsellors of Truth and not of Fraud is fulfilled the promise 'They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.'

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CHAPTER XXIV

CIRCLE VIII —MALFOLGE THE FRAUDULENT

Bolgia IX Schismatics

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The Battleground
of Schism

THE ninth Moat to which we now come, is the place of punishment of Sowers of Discord between man and man by means of schism and scandal. The scene which met Dante's eyes as he looked down into the valley from the bridge that spanned it, was so horrible and ghastly that speech and mind alike failed to reproduce it. If all the wounded in the great battles fought on 'Apulia's fateful land' were gathered together, from the wars of the 'Trojans' down to Tagliacozzo, the sight would not equal 'the ghastly mode of the ninth bolgia'. During their lifetime the sinners of this Moat had broken up by heresy and scandal the unity of the body of mankind, and now their punishment is to have their own bodies broken up—cloven and mutilated in different parts and in varying degrees, according to the kind of discord which they sowed. At a certain point in the valley was stationed a devil with a sword, and, as the sinners marched past him, he clove each according to his guilt. By the time the cloven soul had completed the circuit of the valley, the

wound was healed, and once more the demon smote him. The general symbolism is obvious. The devil indicates that the sowing of discord is a diabolic sin. 'To raise a discord contrary to that good concord which is the work of charity,' says Aquinas, 'is a grievous sin. hence it is said, "Six things there are which the Lord hateth, and the seventh His soul detesteth", and the seventh is set down, "him that soweth discord among brethren"'¹ The cleaving of the souls is an obvious repayment in kind. And, finally, the constant repetition of the wound after it was healed is symbolic of the way in which, whenever the wounds of discord between man and man which they inflicted began to close, these Schismatics were not satisfied till they tore them open again.

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Three kinds of Schismatics seem to be distinguished, according as they broke up the unity of the Church, of the State, or of the Family, although, of course, it is to be remembered that the distinction is not a rigid one, factions of Church, State, and Family frequently blending into one another. Of the religious Schismatics, the first named is Mohammed, probably because the greatest. It is curious that Dante does not regard him as the founder of a new religion, but as the author of a schism in the Christian faith. The reason may be that Christianity being, in Dante's view, the universal religion, any rival faith which disputed its claims was regarded by him as a schism in the ideal Christian unity of mankind. The more probable reason, however, is that Mohammedanism is an attempt to unite Jewish

Three forms
of Schism

In Church
Mohammed

¹ *Summa*, ii-ii q. xxviii a. 1, *Prov.* vi. 16, 19

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and Christian elements on the basis of monotheism. The greatness of the Mohammedan schism is symbolized by the greatness of the Prophet's wound · he is completely disembowelled—cloven from chin to fork—the entrails hanging between his legs Dante describes the hideous sight in words which will hardly bear repeating, probably to indicate the foulness of the Mohammedan schism The punishment is also peculiarly appropriate to one who used the sword so relentlessly to propagate his creed. When he saw Dante watching him from the bridge, with his own hands he tore open his breast, saying, 'See now how I rend myself, see how mangled is Mohammed'—inflicting on himself the fate he had so often measured out to others ¹

Ali, the first
disciple of
Mohammed

The False Prophet then pointed out, walking and weeping in front of him, Ali, his son-in-law and earliest disciple, cleft in the only place where Mohammed is whole—'from chin to forelock' ² This ghastly wound has a double appropriateness As he was entering the mosque for prayers, Ali was struck down by assassins, the blow falling on his head The symbolic meaning of this wound which he bears even in Hell, is that Ali was the author of a schism within Mohammedanism itself, and a schism which arose out of the question who was to be the head of the religion The followers of Mohammed after his death fought desperately over the succession, and it was not till three others had reigned that the Caliphate fell to Ali Even then his right was so hotly disputed that to this day the

¹ *Inf* xxviii 22-31

² *Inf* xxviii 32-33.

Mohammedan world is broken in two by a cleavage as distinct as that which in Christendom divides Protestant and Papist. The orthodox and by far the larger sect, called Sunnites—for the most part to be found in Turkey—reject Ali's claims and hold by the traditions of the Koran. His followers are known by the name of Shutes or Sectaries, and include the whole population of Persia. 'Originally the Shutes were simply the partisans of Ali and of his descendants. In the course of time, when the whole of Persia had adopted the cause of the family of Ali, Shism became the receptacle of all the religious ideas of the Persians, and Dualism, Gnosticism, and Manicheism, were to be seen reflected in it. Even in the lifetime of Ali, a converted Jew, named Abdallah b Saba, had striven to introduce foreign elements into Islam. Thus, he alleged that Ali was to be adored as an incarnation of the Deity. These ideas, though rejected with horror by Ali himself, and by the greater part of the first Shutes, gradually made way, and all the direct descendants of Ali became veritable deities in the eyes of their respective partisans.'¹ If we may suppose that Dante was acquainted with the Shute expectation of the Mahdi, it would give a peculiar significance to the wound in Ali's head. '*Mahdi*, or "the well-guided," is the name given by the Shutes to that member of the family of Ali who, according to their belief, is one day to gain possession of the whole world, and set up the reign of righteousness in it.' Dante might then have recognized in this rival Messiah the very

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¹ *Encyc Brit*, Article Mohammedanism Eastern Caliphate

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Fra Dolcino

head and front of the whole Mohammedan schism. Taking Mohammed and Ali together, the schism was complete—from fork to forelock

Just as Mohammed had one foot lifted to depart, he stayed himself in order to send a strange warning to a Christian Schismatic, Fra Dolcino, whose name resounded through Italy in the opening years of the fourteenth century

‘Now say to Fra Dolcino, then, to arm him,
Thou, who perhaps shalt see the sun ere long,
If soon he wish not here to follow me,
So with provisions, that no stress of snow
May give the victory to the Novarese,
Which otherwise to gain would not be light’¹

The reference is to a schism in the North of Italy, the adherents of which called themselves the Apostolic Brothers. It is not easy to get at the exact truth concerning the character and aims of its leader, Fra Dolcino. By some he is regarded as a true reformer of the Church, sincerely striving to bring her back to the purity and simplicity of Apostolic days. Mariotti, for example, defends him vigorously, declaring that his aim was substantially that of Dante himself. ‘Divested of all fables which ignorance, prejudice, or open calumny involved it in, Dolcino’s scheme amounted to nothing more than a reformation, not of religion, but of the Church, his aim was merely the destruction of the temporal power of the clergy, and he died for his country no less than for his God. The wealth, arrogance, and corruption of the Papal See appeared

¹ /nf xxviii 55-60

to him, as it appeared to Dante, as it appeared to a thousand other patriots before and after him, an eternal hindrance to the union, peace, and welfare of Italy, as it was a perpetual check upon the progress of the human race, and a source of infinite scandal to the piety of earnest believers.¹ Obviously Dante's own view is far removed from this, and it is difficult to believe that he deliberately consigned Dolcino to this Moat without some grounds for his judgment. Probably he shared the opinion of his day that he was a dangerous schismatic, who preached a community of goods and wives, lived a grossly immoral life, and gained hundreds of followers by the sanction which his easy creed gave to sin. Whatever the truth be, Clement ordered a crusade against him, to which Novara furnished a large contingent. Fra Dolcino and his followers took refuge among the mountains near Vercelli, and successfully defended themselves for more than a year. At last the 'stress of snow' to which Dante refers cut off his supplies of food, and in 1307 he and his companion, Margaret of Trent, famous for her great beauty, were burnt to death. Writing from the standpoint of the year 1300, Dante, of course, had to put all this in the form of a prophetic warning.

But the most curious thing about this warning is that Mohammed should be the sender of it. Why should *he* trouble himself about a Christian schismatic? We may be sure his aim was not to save Fra Dolcino from the doom of this Moat, but simply to injure the Christian Church. The longer this

¹ Mariotti's *Fra Dolcino and his Times*, p. 297

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heretic could hold out against the Pope, the greater the schism he would create in Christendom, and therefore the greater Mohammed's malignant joy. If there is any truth in the charge that Dolcino taught community of wives, the Prophet may have had some sympathy with a man who had certain points of contact with himself

Schism in the
State
Pier da
Medicina

Coming now to Schismatics of the State, three examples are given. The first is Pier da Medicina, who claims to have seen Dante 'up in Latian land'. When the family to which he belonged, the Biancucci of Bologna, were banished from that city, he devoted himself to stirring up strife between the lords of Romagna, and in particular between the Polenta family of Ravenna, and the Malatesta of Rimini. His hatred of Malatestino, lord of the latter city—'that traitor who sees only with one eye'—breaks out even here. Like Mohammed, he takes the opportunity of sending a warning message back to earth. Malatestino, having resolved to make himself master of the neighbouring town of Fano, devised a plot to get two of its leading citizens out of his way. He therefore invited Messer Guido and Angiolello to hold a conference with him at La Catolica, a small town on the Adriatic, not far from Rimini, and while on their way to meet him he had them treacherously cast overboard and drowned. Pier's warning message urges them to refuse Malatestino's perfidious invitation. For his own treacherous sowing of discords, he is himself horribly slashed and mutilated about the head—his throat slit, his nose cut off close below the eyebrows, and

one ear wanting. One wonders whether this may not be the fashion in which one of the tyrants on whom he practised his treachery—Malatestino, for instance—despatched him to the other world. Or it may be the return upon himself of the wounds and mutilations inflicted by him on others, in the course of the wars and broils which his plottings stirred up. Still another meaning is suggested—the throat which was the passage for so many lies is now slit, the nose which was so fond of thrusting itself into other people's business, will thrust itself no more, and one of the ears so eager to listen to every scandal is gone.¹

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In referring to Rimini, Pier da Medicina had spoken of it as

Curio, the
Roman
Tribune

'the land which some one here with me
Would fain be fasting from the vision of'—

that is, wished he had never seen, and Dante now begs him to show him who he is. For reply, Pier lays his hand on the jaw of one of his companions, forces open his mouth, and shows him 'the tongue slit in the windpipe.' It is Curio, the Roman Tribune, who, according to Lucan, whom Dante follows here,² urged Cæsar to cross the Rubicon and thus begin the great civil war in Rome.

'This is he, and he speaks not
This one, being banished, every doubt submerged
In Cæsar, affirming that the man prepared
Always with injury endured delay.'

This stern condemnation of Curio raises several

¹ *Inf* xxviii 64-90

² *Pharsalia*, i 280 281

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strange questions One writer says 'Curio gets scant justice, seeing that in Dante's view Cæsar in all he did was only carrying out the Divine purpose regarding the Empire'¹ The difference, however, between the two men is obvious enough Cæsar did everything he could to avert civil war, and only moved when every hope had failed To Curio, on the contrary, the dissensions in Rome were but a welcome means of making his own fortune Momm- sen describes him as utterly lacking in moral and political principle, 'unsurpassed in refined elegance in fluent and clever oratory in dexterity of intrigue, and willing to sell his tongue to the highest bidder Originally he was a partisan of Pompey He then offered to sell his services to Cæsar and was rejected, but 'the talent, which he thenceforward displayed in his attacks on Cæsar, induced the latter subsequently to buy him up—the price was high, but the commodity was worth the money' It is no injustice to place such a man in this Moat Doubtless it is for this reason his tongue is gone—he had sold it, and it was the property of the buyer A much greater difficulty rises out of the fact that Dante himself seems to act toward Florence precisely the part which he condemns Curio for acting toward Rome In his Letter to the Emperor, Henry VII of Luxemburg, written in 1311, he reproaches him with great severity for his delay in proceeding to chastise the city of Florence, and the strange thing is that he quotes the very words of Curio 'Once more let the voice of Curio to Cæsar thunder forth

Did Dante
play the part
of Curio?

¹ Sibbald

² Mommsen's *History of Rome*, v. 183

" While parties tremble, only weakly united,
 Delay not, a man prepared should never dally
 Labour and fear are both dearly bought " ¹

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It appears from several parts of this Canto that Dante felt he had laid himself open to a suspicion of being himself a sower of strife. This would account for the way in which again and again he clears himself of the charge. When Mohammed sees him standing on the bridge, he asks him why he thus postpones his punishment by not descending to the valley, and Virgil repels the insinuation of his guilt. Later, when he sees Bertran de Born holding up his own head in his hand like a lantern, he says he would scarcely dare to tell a thing so strange,

If it were not that conscience reassures me,
 The good companion which a man emboldens
 Under the hauberk of its feeling pure -

However he may appear to others to have deserved such punishments himself, his own good conscience, like a coat of mail, gives him courage to narrate them. And, in truth, there is no real inconsistency in his quoting Curio's advice to the Emperor. In itself, it was advice entirely after Dante's own heart, and his object in quoting it had nothing in common with Curio's in giving it. As we saw, Curio was an unprincipled politician who sold his tongue to the highest bidder, and civil war itself was only a pawn which he played in the game of making his own fortune, whereas when Dante urges Henry to attack Florence, his ultimate aim is to crush that chronic

¹ Latham's *Dante's Eleven Letters*, p. 154

² *Inf.* xxviii 115-117

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civil war which deluged its streets with blood, by reducing under one civil head all parties and factions. Doubtless Dante's personal fortunes were involved in the Emperor's success, nevertheless the unity of Italy was his first concern, and he certainly had not sold to him or any other the tongue out of his head

Schism in the
Family
Mosca de'
Lamberti

The third example is one which shows how easily schisms of the Family became schisms of the State in Dante's day. The soul is Mosca de' Lamberti, to whom the poet traced the feud of Guelphs and Ghibellines which was the ruin of Florence and himself. The story is well known. In the year 1215, Buondelmonte de Buondelmonti, a Florentine noble, broke his promise of marriage to a lady of the Amidei family, in order to take instead one of the Donati. The friends of the slighted lady met to consult how the affront was to be avenged, and this Mosca decided their hesitations by the exclamation which he here recalls. 'A thing done has an end' - meaning that he should be slain, and this was accordingly done. 'On the morning of Easter of the Resurrection,' according to Villani's account, Mosca and the rest waylaid Buondelmonte as he rode into the city 'nobly arrayed in new white apparel, and upon a white palfrey,' dragged him from his horse, and slew him where the statue of Mars stood on the Ponte Vecchio - an ominous spot, for the deed spread war through the whole city. 'This death of M. Buondelmonte,' says Villani, 'was the cause and beginning of the accursed parties of the Guelphs

¹ *Par* xvi 140-147 *Comp Inf* xiii 143-145

and Ghibellines in Florence, albeit long before there were factions among the noble citizens and the said parties existed by reason of the strifes and questions between the Church and the Empire' Those who held to the Buondelmonti took the name of Guelphs, while the adherents of the Amidei called themselves Ghibellines; and thus a family feud developed into political factions which devastated Florence with civil war There followed, says the historian already quoted, 'much evil and disaster to our city, as hereafter shall be told, and it is believed that it will never have an end, if God do not cut it short'¹ The punishment of the man who originated this strife is that the hands which helped to murder Buondelmonte are now cut off

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And one who had both hands lopped off
The stumps uplifting thro' the murky air,
So that the blood made foul his face,
Cried out 'Thou wilt remember too the Mosca,
Who said, alas! "A thing done has an end!
Which was the evil seed for the Tuscan people
And I added 'And death unto thy race',
Whence he, accumulating woe on woe
Departed like a person sad and crazed--

the increase of his pain arising evidently from the ruin he had brought upon his kindred In *Par* xvi 110, Dante's ancestor, Cacciaguida, refers to the Lamberti--naming them by their armorial bearings, 'the Balls of Gold'--as an honourable family in his day, but it is said that it had completely died out by the end of the thirteenth century Aristotle in his

¹ Villani, v 38.

² *Inf* xxviii 103-111

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Ethics thinks that the adversity of friends on earth, if it is known to the dead, can have a very slight power to make them unhappy, but this is one of the few points on which Dante differs from his 'Divine judgment'¹

Bertran de
Born

The most startling punishment, however, is reserved for a man who sowed discord between father and son, as Ahithophel did between David and Absalom. His name is Bertran de Born, lord of Hautefort, near Perigueux, and a famous troubadour. In his *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (ii 2), Dante quotes him as a writer of poetry in the vulgar tongue on the subject of war, and in the *Convito* (iv 11) he refers to him as an example of munificence, without, however, specifying any particular act. He is set in this Moat for his perpetual stirring up of strife and war between Henry II of England and his son Prince Henry, called here 'the Young King'.² He received this title because he was crowned twice during his father's lifetime. Stirred up by his mother, Queen Eleanor, he demanded England or Normandy, and when both were refused, carried on

'The Young
King'

¹ *Ethics*, i 11.

The reading *re Giovanni*, is certainly a copyist's error for *re giovane*. Dante cannot have been ignorant of the name of this prince, and the constant recurrence of the words 'the Young King' in the writings of Bertran is decisive of the right reading. The Lament on the Death of Prince Henry begins thus:

If all the pain and misery and woe
The tears the losses with misfortune fraught
That in this dark life man can ever know
Were heaped together - all would seem as naught
Against the death of the young English King
For by it youth and worth are sunk in gloom
And the world dark and dreary as a tomb
Reft of all joy and full of grief and sadness.

(*Lives of the Troubadours*, by Ida Farnell, pp. 80-124)

war at intervals against his father for ten years, till his death from fever in 1183. If ever the Young King slackened in the struggle, it is said that his friend, Bertran de Born, stung him into renewed activity by one of his songs. Dante's authority for this was the mediæval biography of the poet: 'He was a valiant knight and warrior, a good lover, and a good troubadour, and wise and fair-spoken, and knew to work both good and ill. And ever, when he would, was he lord over King Henry of England, and over his sons, and ever did he delight in setting strife betwixt father and son, and betwixt brother and brother.' Whether in repentance or not, we cannot say, but he ended his life as a monk in the Cistercian monastery of Dalon. This, however, availed nothing with Dante, who tells us that he saw him walking in this valley and carrying his head in his hand like a lantern.

I truly saw — and still I seem to see it,
 A trunk without a head go in like manner
 As went the others of the mournful herd
 And by the hair it held the severed head,
 Swinging in his hand in fashion of a lantern,
 And that gazed at us and said: 'O me!
 Of himself he made for himself a lamp,
 And they were two in one, and one in two,
 How it can be. He knows who so ordains

When Bertran came to the foot of the bridge on which Dante stood, he lifted the ghastly lantern the length of his arm, that his words might be clearly heard. His explanation of his punishment is that, the father being the natural head of the son, he who parts the two severs his own head from his body

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'Now see the grievous penalty,
Thou who breathing goest to view the dead,
See if any is as great as this
And that thou mayest carry news of me,
Know that I am Bertran de Born, the same
Who gave to the Young King the evil counsels
I made father and son rebels each to each
Abithophel did not more with Absalom
And David with his villainous goadings
Because I parted persons so united,
Parted I carry now my brain, alas,
From its beginning which is in this trunk
Thus is observed in me the counterpoise¹

Dante and the
Vendetta

One last incident seems intended to show Dante's attitude to the vendetta,—that wild family blood-feud so relentlessly bequeathed from generation to generation. The sight of these cloven souls so filled his eyes with tears that he longed to remain and weep, but Virgil rebukes his delay. Why linger over this Bolgia when he had not done so over the others? The valley had a circuit of two-and-twenty miles, and obviously he could not hope to number all the shades in that vast round. The moon, too, was underneath their feet, that is, it was one or two in the afternoon, and only a short time remained to see the rest. Dante replied that his reason for lingering was that he was looking for 'a spirit of his own blood, whom he believed to be in this Moat. This was *Gerri del Bello* (*Gerri Ruggieri*) del Bello of the Alghieri family, a first cousin, it is said of Dante's father. He was a great stirrer up of strife, and was finally

Gerri del Bello

¹ *Inf.* xxviii. 118-142. It has been pointed out that 'the counterpoise (*contrappeso*) is not simple justice administered in any way but in the particular mode and fashion of the sin

murdered by one of the Sacchetti with whom he was at feud. Virgil then told Dante that while he was absorbed in gazing at Bertran de Born, he had seen him at the foot of the bridge, pointing at him with threatening finger, and had heard the others name him Geri del Bello. Dante replies that he knows the cause of his anger—his death had never been avenged by any of his kindred, or, as he puts it, 'any who is a partner of the shame,'—

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' therefore he went away
Without speaking to me, as I imagine,
And in that has made me pity him the more '

The meaning of this pity has been much disputed. At first glance it seems to imply sympathy with the vendetta, which was sanctioned by the law of Florence in Dante's day, and many commentators take this view, nevertheless it seems utterly inconsistent with the whole drift of the passage, which means nothing if it is not a condemnation of such feuds. Mosca de' Lambertini has his hands cut off for originating one such family feud, which embroiled the whole city. Farther up in Hell, Guy de Montfort is plunged up to the throat in the River of Blood for avenging his father's death by murder. Dante could not therefore with any consistency have avowed sympathy with the vendetta. His pity for his kinsman is not that his death has remained unavenged, but rather that the passion for revenge burns on unquenched by death and adds a new torture to his agony. In Rossetti's *Dante and his Circle* (241-248), a translation is given of a sonnet by Forese Donati in which he 'taunts Dante ironically for not avenging

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Geri Alighieri,' and more generally for his tame acceptance of blows and forgiveness of injuries

'Thou hast taught us a fair fashion, sooth to say
That whoso lays a stick well to thy back
Thy comrade and thy brother he shall be'

It is very difficult to recognize Dante in this garb of meekness, but at least it shows that he had the reputation of being no friend of the vendetta¹

The Valley of
Discord, the
Image of
Italy

Factions and schisms unhappily still exist, but the modern spirit of toleration makes it difficult for us to understand why Dante thus fiercely plunges Schismatics of every kind into one of the lowest pits of Hell. The historical reason is undoubtedly the deplorable condition of Italy in his day. It was one vast battlefield, and the wounds of the souls in this valley are but the spiritual and symbolic counterpart of the literal wounds which the discords they had sowed had inflicted upon their fellows. Look where he would, Church, State, and Family were like the sinners here—continually cloven by the sword of the Demon of Discord. The best commentary on this and many another passage of the poem is the *De Monarchia*, the leading idea of which is that mankind is one, and that its welfare can be secured only

¹ *Inf.* xxix. 1-6. Thirty years after his death *forti* was avenged by his nephews who murdered one of the Sacchetti. In 1342 the two families were formally reconciled. Speaking of Rome in the fifteenth century, Gregorovius says: 'Criminal justice had a difficult task for the people had become utterly depraved by vendette and hereditary feuds.' The defiant power of individuals mocked at law, and every one fought for himself as he pleased. The men who fought in vendetta were called brigosi. In certain circumstances they had the right of barring their houses and filling them with armed men. Vendetta was the most dreadful scourge of all cities of Italy, and in Rome it claimed countless victims. Not only relations but also strangers offered themselves for hire to him who had insult to avenge.

by its union under one head, who is, in temporal things, the Emperor, and in spiritual things, the Pope. This unity of mankind was with Dante much more than a philosophical or political theory, he held it with the passion of a religious ideal, deducing it expressly from the unity of God. 'The human race is well, nay, at its best state, when, so far as can be, it is made like unto God. But the human race is then most made like unto God when most it is one, for the true principle of oneness is in Him alone. Wherefore it is written "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one God." But the race of man is most one when it is united wholly in one body, and it is evident that this cannot be, except when it is subject to one prince.' Once only, 'under the divine Augustus,' a perfect monarchy existed, and therefore universal peace, and on that 'fulness of the time' Christ set the seal of his approval by willing to be born then. 'But,' he goes on to lament, 'how the world has fared since that "seamless robe" has suffered rending by the talons of ambition, we may read in books, would that we might not see it with our eyes. Oh, race of mankind! what storms must toss thee, what losses must thou endure, what shipwrecks must buffet thee, as long as thou, a beast of many heads, strivest after contrary things. Thou art sick in both thy faculties of understanding, thou art sick in thine affections. Unanswerable reasons fail to heal thy higher understanding, the very sight of experience convinces not thy lower understanding, not even the sweetness of divine persuasion charms thy affections, when it breathes

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into thee through the music of the Holy Ghost:
"Behold, how good and how pleasant a thing it is,
brethren, to dwell together in unity"¹ In the sixth
Canto of the *Purgatorio* this torn and distracted
state of his country wrings from him a loud and
bitter cry of pain, which almost rivals the lamenta-
tions of the prophets over Israel

Ah! serve Italy, thou hostelry of grief!
A ship without a pilot in great tempest!
No Lady thou of Provinces, but brothel!

The passage is too long to quote in full, but it ought to be read in connection with this Moat of Schismatics. Dante proceeds to denounce bitterly both Pope and Emperor for the disorders of the country: the Pope was so ambitious for temporal power that he would not 'let Cæsar sit in the saddle',² and the Emperor, the 'German Albert,' for 'greed of those transalpine lands, had allowed 'the garden of the empire to be waste'. To this sin and neglect of the heads of Church and State, Dante traces the feuds and factions which turned all Italy into one vast battlefield like this valley of Hell. It is his horror of this condition of anarchy, and his yearning for unity which amounted to a religious passion, that explain his application to Henry VII. of the words 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!'. They sound irreverent, yet

¹ *De Mon.* i. 8. 16.

² In his famous Bull *Unam sanctam*, issued in 1302, Boniface VIII. declares submission to the Pope necessary to salvation. 'Indeed we declare, announce and define, that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff.'

³ *Letter* vii. 2.

nothing was further from Dante's mind. If the Emperor could in very deed bring mankind into a unity, and therefore into peace and concord, Dante felt that he would in simple truth 'take away the sin of the world'—the countless wars and outrages which made the world a kind of Hell

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When we ask the meaning of the punishment, we might content ourselves with the idea of a retaliation in kind, 'on the principle,' as one says, 'that just the very sins that a man has committed become the instruments of his punishment, for these sinners have divided hearts that were united, and minds that were at one in matters of Faith, or friendship, or trust, or consanguinity, and have often drawn men into wars, to deaths, to wounds, to hatreds, and to occasions of stumbling' But the ethical idea goes deeper than this Dante means us to understand the great truth that it is only in maintaining the unity of his fellows that any man can maintain his own unity These unhappy souls are themselves cloven and mutilated by no arbitrary decree, but by the operation of an inevitable natural law That law is the simple one that no man is complete in himself, our very individuality receives form and contents from the fact that we are more than individuals We are members one of another, the relations of Family, Church, and State, to which Dante specially refers, are not arbitrary conventions which a man can break up and cast away at his will They are the relations ordained by God for the development of the separate individuality of every human soul That which we call 'self' is defined by

Who cleaves
others cleaves
himself

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—

its relations to other selves, and the greater the number of right relations it holds to others, the more complete the self grows. Hence it is that to create any schism in that body of mankind of which we are members, is of necessity to create a corresponding schism in ourselves. The cleaving of these Schismatics and sowers of strife by the Demon of Discord is, therefore, no fantastic or arbitrary punishment. It is the natural and inevitable operation of that law of solidarity by which the individual soul attains the fulness and unity of its own nature only in the fulness and unity of the entire body of mankind.

CHAPTER XXV

CIRCLE VIII — MALEBOIGE THE FRAUDULENT

Bolgia X Falsifiers

THE pilgrims now arrive at the tenth Moat—the last cloister of Malebolge, in which, as Carlyle says, the sinners are the 'lay-brothers' and the demons the monks. At first the darkness was so thick that they could see nothing from the crag on which they stood, but when they reached the summit of the bridge, out of the gloom rose a foul smell of putrid limbs and cries of pain, as if all the hospitals in the most fever-haunted regions of Italy and Sardinia had emptied their sick into this black ditch. So heartrending were the groans and lamentations of the vast lazaret-house, that Dante put his hands to his ears to shut them out. Descending to the last and lowest of the ramparts of Malebolge, he was able through the darkened air to discern some of the sufferers. One was lying on his face, a second across the shoulders of another, while some crawled about from place to place to find a spot to ease their pain. They are the souls of Falsifiers, divided, as we shall see, into four classes. Falsifiers of Metals, Four Classes of Falsifiers of Persons, of Coins, and of their Word. These four

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The Lazar
House of the
Falsifiers

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species of Falsifiers are afflicted with different diseases, according to their particular form of the sin, the general conception of the punishment seeming to be that men who spent their lives falsifying things on earth, are now themselves falsified, so to speak, by horrible diseases which change and disfigure their true forms and features. The idea may have been suggested by Aquinas. Discussing the sin of lying, whether in word, or sign, or deed, St Thomas says 'a lie is an act falling on undue matter for words being naturally signs of thoughts, it is a thing unnatural and undue for any one to signify in word what he has not in his mind'.¹ The *unnaturalness* of this sin is the leading idea in the mind of Aquinas, and Dante simply throws this unnaturalness into the visible form of disease, which is an unnatural state of the human body.

I 'Apes of
Nature' -
Alchemists

Passing along the rampart in silence as through the wards of a hospital, and listening to the cries of the sick, the travellers came on two souls, leaning against each other like two platters set before the fire to warm. The comparison has probably a double appropriateness: it refers first to the utensils and fires they once used in their old occupation of Alchemy, and, in the next place, to the fact that they were both burned to death for the practice of this black art. Virgil asks them if there are any Latians among them, and they reply that they are Latians both. At Dante's request one of them relates how he came into this Moat. His name was Griffolino of Arezzo, who was burned at Siena on a

Griffolino
of Arezzo

¹ *Summa*, II II q. CX. 2. 3.

charge of heresy, or, according to others, of necromancy. Neither one nor other, however, was his real sin, else he would have been in one of the Moats or Circles above. His tragic death came about through a mere joke. He had boasted in jest to Albert, the reputed son of the Bishop of Siena, that he could fly through the air like Daedalus, and because he did not teach him the art, Albert denounced him to his father the Bishop, who had him burned for necromancy or heresy. But the Judge of Hell, 'Minos, who cannot err,' corrected the Bishop's judgment, consigning him to this Moat for his real sin of Alchemy.

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When Dante heard Siena mentioned, he turned to Virgil, exclaiming,

Siena and
the 'Spend
thrift Club'

'Now was ever
So vain a people as the Sienese?
Not for a certainty the French by far'

By vanity Dante seems to mean a kind of empty-headed frivolity. It is said that to this day the Florentines call a nail without a head 'a Sienese nail'. On hearing this judgment of Sienese vanity, the second of the two Alchemists broke in sarcastically

'Always excepting Stricca,
Who knew the art of moderate expenses,
And Niccolo, who the luxurious use
Of the clove did first discover
In the garden where such seed takes root,
And leaving out the band, among whom squandered
Caccia d'Ascanio his vineyard and great forest,
And where his wit the Abbagliato proffered'

The reference is to four members of the *Brigata*

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Spendereccia or 'Spendthrift Club' of Siena: a fifth, Lano, we have seen pursued in the Wood of the Suicides by the black dogs of his own extravagance. The Club consisted of twelve rich young men who hired a great palace in Siena in which each had his rooms, gave magnificent banquets, and lived on such a scale of insane extravagance that in a few months they reduced themselves to poverty and became a laughing-stock to the whole country. 'Abbagliato' means 'dazed,' and is probably a nickname like our 'muddle-head'. He is thought by some to be Folgore da San Gimignano, the poet of the Club, to which he is believed to have addressed a set of Sonnets in which he sings the pleasures of each month of the changing year. This would account for the reference to his wit: the other members gave their wealth, he being a poor man could contribute nothing but his wit, his poetic gift, of which obviously Dante had a poorer opinion than the young rakes for whom he sang.¹

Capocchio of
Florence

The second of the Alchemists, who thus sarcastically defends the prodigals from the charge of vanity, is one Capocchio, probably a Florentine, who was also burned for Alchemy at Siena. He reminds Dante that he had known him on earth as a cunning alchemist—'a good ape of Nature'

'But that thou know who thus doth second thee
Against the Siennese, make sharp thine eye

¹ *Inf.* XXIX. 121-132. For some account of Folgore, see J. A. Symonds's *Renaissance in Italy: Italian Literature*, i. 46-50, 462-466. This 'Abbagliato' is, however, usually identified with another member of the Club, Bartolommeo de' Folcacchieri, 'a man of small means but of good abilities, which however, he entirely sacrificed from keeping company with so dissipated a set of spendthrifts'.

Tow'rd's me, so that my face well answer thee,
 So shalt thou see I am Capocchio's shade,
 Who the metals falsified by alchemy,
 And thou must remember, if I eye thee well,
 How I was of Nature a good ape¹

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 —

The usual interpretation of the phrase 'a good ape of Nature' is that Capocchio had, according to the old commentators, great powers of mimicry, but I prefer to regard it as descriptive of his skill as an alchemist. It is said that Dante was his fellow-student in Natural Philosophy, and there may even be a hint that there was a time in his life when he too had felt the temptation of alchemical experiments. If so, the time was past, he now saw in the effort to transmute one metal into another an impious attempt to 'ape Nature,' and thus falsify God's own handiwork.

The punishment of these Alchemists is twofold—
 paralysis and leprosy. So weak are they that they
 have to prop each other up like two pans before
 the fire, and when Virgil tells them that Dante is
 alive, they start asunder, each trembling like a man
 paralyzed. Some commentators trace this paralytic
 condition to the excessive use of mercury by alchemists, and give as their authority Avicenna, the
 Arabian philosopher and physician. The other
 disease of leprosy is described with a realism which
 almost nauseates. From head to foot the two
 wretches are covered with scabs, the itch of which
 is so intolerable a torture that they never cease
 tearing away the leprous scurf with their nails.

Punishment of
 Alchemists
 Paralysis and
 Leprosy

¹ Inf. xxix. 133 l. 39

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And never saw I plied a currycomb
By stable-boy for whom his master waits,
Nor him who keeps unwillingly awake,
As each was plying fast the bite
Of nails upon himself, for the great fury
Of the itch, which has no other succour
And so the nails downward drew the scab
In fashion as a knife the scales of bream,
Or other fish that has them larger still¹

The symbolic meaning of all this is not easy to conjecture. 'It is worthy of remark,' says one commentator, 'that Aristotle describes lead as a leprous gold, and these people who wanted to convert lead into gold, are now one mass of putrefying leprosy.' This, however, only explains the punishment from the outside, the interior moral significance must flow from the nature of the sin itself. In the first place, as these Alchemists were 'apes of Nature,' so this disease apes Nature in their own persons. Leprosy changes a man into a hideous ape and caricature of humanity: those who falsify Nature are themselves falsified. Nor is this a mere fanciful idea. Nothing so surely preserves the true form and features of our humanity as reverence for Nature and loyal submission to the laws and ordinances which God has revealed in her, any attempt to run counter to her order, and to transmute her into something else than God made her to be, issues in the end in some deformity and disease of the soul, which eats it away like leprosy. In the next place, the itch represents the torment of restlessness which alchemical pursuits seem to create, and the paralysis

The Itch of
Alchemy

¹ *Inf* XXIX 78-84

the way in which they deaden a man's faculties in every natural and healthy direction. Perhaps the best commentary on this punishment is Balzac's novel, *La Recherche de l'Absolu*, in which he gives a most vivid and terrible picture of the way in which Alchemy, like a leprous itch, eats away a man's fortune, family affections, mind, heart, soul, and leaves him utterly paralyzed for any natural pursuit or interest. Dante means to tell us that this unhealthy itch which gave them no rest on earth, loses none of its torturing power in eternity: there as here it eats away the soul like an incurable and loathsome disease, and leaves it for ever paralyzed for things healthy, natural, and right.

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At this point two souls come rushing upon the scene—'shadows pale and naked'. They belong to the second of the four classes, Falsifiers of the Person: those who on earth, for some fraudulent end, assumed the person or character of others. One of the wretched pair is Myrrha, daughter of Cinyras, King of Cyprus, who disguised herself as a stranger that she might become, in Dante's words,

II Falsifiers
of the Person

Myrrha of
Cyprus

Beyond all rightful love, her father's lover

In his letter to the Emperor, Henry VII, Dante calls Florence 'the accursed and impious Myrrha', the idea being that the city in yielding herself so completely to her spiritual Father, the Pope, was guilty of a species of spiritual incest.¹

The other 'shadow' is a certain Florentine, Gianni Schicchi, of the family of the Cavalcanti. The story

Gianni
Schicchi

¹ *Inf.* xxx 37-41, *Letter* vii 7

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—

of his personation is peculiar Buoso Donati—probably the same as in the *Moat of the Thieves* in Canto xxv 140—when he neared the end of his sinful life was anxious to make for himself friends out of the mammon of unrighteousness by leaving his ill-got wealth to purposes of charity, and returning it in the form of legacies to those whom he had robbed His son—or nephew, as some think—Simone Donati, fearing to lose the fortune, persuaded him to postpone the making of his will until it was too late, indeed, according to one version of the story, he had him smothered Concealing the body of the dead man, he persuaded this Gianni Schicchi, who had most marvellous powers of mimicry, to put himself in Buoso's bed, assume the voice and features of the dying man, and dictate to a notary a will leaving everything to Simone Gianni sustained his part to a miracle, but took care to pay himself for his services as personator in one clause of the will which he dictated he left to himself what Dante calls 'the lady of the herd, a beautiful mare valued at a thousand gold florins' This dangerous gift of mimicry seems to have run in the blood According to Toynbee, Gianni 'had a son Guiduccio, who was nicknamed Scimmia ("ape"), a sobriquet which appears to have been adopted by the family, as the figure of an ape is sculptured on Guiduccio's tomb in Santa Croce' Dante seems to distinguish in Myrrha and Gianni Schicchi two species of personation the former 'falsified herself in the form of another', the latter 'falsified Buoso Donati in himself' The distinction is very obscure, but it may mean that

'The lady of
the herd'

Myrrha personated by assuming a disguise, 'the form of another,' while Gianni personated 'in himself,' in the play and alteration of his own form and features. Fortunately nothing of importance in the interpretation depends on the distinction ¹

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Now, the punishment of this Falsification of Person ^{Punishment—}
is insanity. The two shades rush in, pale and naked, ^{Insanity}
and biting madly as a boar does when thrust forth from his sty—perhaps with an allusion to the rush of the swine when the demons entered into them. 'That goblin,' Gianni Schicchi, as Griffolino calls him, in the frenzy of his madness seized the wretched leper, Capocchio, by the nape of the neck with his teeth, and dragged him savagely along the ground on his belly. The reason why he fixes on him is probably that he was a mimic like himself. The punishment of this sin is in kind. On earth these souls personated others, thus divesting themselves of their own personality, and now they are deprived of that personality for ever. For insanity may be regarded as the substitution of an imaginary personality for the real. Dante saw in the gift of mimicry a great moral danger: it is a ready instrument of fraud, and it involves a certain tampering with our own personal identity. 'Did you never observe,' asks Socrates, 'how imitations, beginning in early youth, at last sink into the constitution and become a second nature of body, voice, and mind?' ²

The third class in this 'cloister' are Falsifiers of ^{III Falsifiers}
Coin. Its chief representative is Maestro Adamo ^{of Coin}

¹ *Inf.* xxx, lines 41 and 44

² *Inf.* xxx 1 48, *Republic*, iii 395

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Maestro
Adam of
Brescia

of Brescia, the title Master signifying his great skill in the art of coining. As the travellers pass, he begs them to look and mark the greatness of his suffering. His disease is dropsy, which has so swelled his body, while it has left his face and neck emaciated, that had his legs been cut off, says Dante, he would have been exactly like a lute. The Counts of Romena in the valley of the Casentino had employed this skilful 'Master' of the art to 'seal with the Baptist's image' (the stamp on one side of the gold florins of Florence) base coins which contained three carats of alloy. The fraud being discovered, the Florentines burned Master Adam on the public road near Romena, a heap of stones called 'The Cairn of the Dead Man' is popularly believed to mark the spot, and until recently passing travellers were in the habit of casting a stone upon it.¹

Punishment
Dropsy

It is difficult to say what exact symbolism the disease of dropsy represented to Dante's mind, but from the nature of the sin, it appears probable that he regarded the derangement in the distribution of the humours of the human body as an image of the corresponding derangement which false coining produces in the body politic. He may have had in view a passage in the *Ethics* (v. 8) in which Aristotle traces the invention of money to the necessity for a medium of exchange which shall have, as far as possible, a constant value. Money is the nearest approach to this constant value yet discovered and any debasing of the currency, by disturbing this fixed standard, throws society into confusion. Just as in dropsy

¹ *Ibid.* xxx. 19-20

one part swells and another pines away, so in the body politic one section of the community is bloated with wealth, while another grows emaciated with poverty

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The significance of the burning thirst from which ~~thirst~~ the forger suffers is more obvious. Like the rich man in the parable, Master Adam longs for a drop of water. It is doubtless symbolic of that thirst for gold which drove him to the crime that sank him to this Moat. It corresponds to the itch of the Alchemists and the insanity of the Personators: the earthly habit has grown into an eternal torment. But perhaps the most striking thing is the way in which the stern justice of God turns the very memory of the spot where the sin was sinned into a greater torture than the thirst itself. The passage must be quoted in full:

'I had while living enough of what I wished,
And now, alas! one little drop of water crave
The rivulets that from the verdant hills
Of Casentino descend down into Arno
Making their channels cool and moist,
Ever before me stand and not in vain
For far more doth their image dry me up
Than the disease which strips my face of flesh
The rigid justice which doth search me through
Draweth occasion from the place I sinned,
The more to set my sighs in flight
There is Romena, where I did falsify
The alloy sealed with the Baptist's image,
For which I left my body burned above ¹

Like many another sinful man, this Master Adam evidently had some genuine delight in the beauty

¹ *Inf.* xxx 62-75

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—

of Nature There may have come to him hours when the loveliness of the hills and rivulets of the Casentino was felt as a rebuke to his base thirst for gold, and for one brief better moment he may have hated the sin which was so utterly out of harmony with the scene Even Falstaff at the end 'played with flowers' and 'babbled o' green fields' Dante wishes to warn us that if we defile some fair scene of earth with an evil deed, the memory of its purity and peace may lurk in the soul with a strange persistence, and, under the revealing touch of death, become a haunting inevitable pain There is, in truth, something peculiarly heinous in sins committed in the midst of the purity and loveliness of God's works—something which His justice may well make the minister of our punishment

'He who sinneth in the city
May find margin to be witty ,

He who in the woods doth sin,
Him the drear fend enters in '

But this Adam of Brescia was consumed by another thirst more burning than that for either gold or water To quench it, he declares he would part with Fonte Branda according to some, the famous fountain of Siena, but much more probably one of the same name at Romena, the scene of his crime This more burning thirst was the desire for vengeance on his employers in the forgery, the three brothers, Guido, Alessandro, and Aghinolfo, Lords of Romena If the 'raving shades,' such as Myrrha and Gianni Schicchi, who wandered through all parts of the valley, spoke truth, one of

the brothers was here already, but Adam, not satisfied with mere report, longed to see his sufferings with his own eyes, and bemoaned his powerlessness to stir which kept him from setting out on the quest

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—

'But what avails it me whose limbs are tied'
If I were only still so light, that in
A hundred years I could advance one inch,
I had already started on the way
Seeking him out 'mong this deformed folk,
Although it winds around eleven miles,
And is not less than half a mile across

Thus powerless this wretched soul sat there consumed with thirst within thirst— for gold, for the cool waters of the Casentino, for vengeance on those who had tempted him to his doom all the good and evil of his earthly life turned into an eternal torment of vain remorse and baffled desire¹

At Dante's request, Master Adam names two souls^{iv} lying close upon his right, and smoking 'like a wet hand in winter' They belong to the fourth and last class, Liars, Falsifiers of their Word,—Potiphar's wife and Sinon the Greek whose false accusation brought Joseph to a dungeon, and Sinon the Greek whose lying tongue

¹ *Inf* xxx 76-87 A letter, attributed to Dante, condoles with Counts Oberto and Guido of Romagna on the death of their uncle Alessandro, who is spoken of as now among the blessed in Paradise. A great controversy has raged over the question whether this is the Alessandro here set in Hell. See Latham's *Dante's Eleven Letters*, pp 35-64

From the eleven miles here and the twenty-two in v 9 of the preceding Canto, much useless ingenuity has been spent in calculating the dimensions of the Inferno as a whole. Gabriel Rossetti thinks Dante wishes to identify the city of Dis with the city of Rome: 'the outward trench of the walls of Rome (whether real or imaginary we say not) was reckoned by Dante's contemporaries to be exactly twenty-two miles and the walls of the city were then and still are, eleven miles round.' See p 266

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Their Punish-
ment—Fever

Quarrel of
Adamo and
Sinon

Virgil's
rebuks to
Dante for
listening

persuaded the Trojans to admit the wooden horse by which their city fell¹ Adam says he found them lying here when he was 'rained' into this chasm, they have not moved since, and he thinks they will not move to all eternity He was soon to learn to his cost that one of them was active enough when he saw occasion for it Their punishment is a burning fever which makes them steam with a foul smoke, and racks their heads with pain It is not easy to say what is the symbolic meaning of this disease Probably in the case of 'the false woman who accused Joseph,' it represents the fever of the unholy passion which drove her to so cruel a slander of an innocent man The pain in the head means that the brain which conceived the lies is now being consumed by them, while the foul smoke may indicate the foulness of the heart within, which thus sends forth the cloud and exhalation of its falseness

Just as they are about to leave this last Moat, a peculiar incident occurs² The Greek, overhearing the conversation, and resenting the way in which he was 'named so darkly' as 'the false Sinon,' suddenly flung out his arm and struck Adam a severe blow on his swollen paunch, which made it resound like a drum The coiner was not slow to return the blow on the face, whereupon there began a shower of mutual taunts and revilings to which Dante stood listening eagerly until roused by Virgil's angry words

Now keep staring!

For little lacks it that I quarrel with *thee*!

¹ *Æn* II 57 ff

² *Inf* xxx 100-148.

Dante turned away in shame so great that it still came over him when he thought of it. Finding no words of excuse, his very look pled for him, and Virgil, pitying his confusion, told him that 'less shame would wash away a greater fault.' At the same time, he warns him earnestly against allowing himself to listen to such vile wrangles

CANTOS
XXIX. 37-
XXX
—

'Make account that I am eye beside thee,
If e'er it come to pass that fortune bring thee
Where there are people in a like dispute
For a base wish it is to wish to hear' ¹

Dante probably had two reasons for relating this incident. one, to show the hatreds and discords which increase the miseries of the lost, the other, to confess and rebuke a weakness which he found in himself, a certain readiness to listen to quarrels. It is a strange weakness to find in so great a lover of peace, and was perhaps due to his delight in the flash of wit and repartee. Whatever the cause, he recognizes it as a serious fault, for which Virgil, his own reason, rebukes him. 'A person of tact,' says Aristotle, 'is one who will use and listen to such language as is suitable to an honourable gentleman.

The language to which a person listens will correspond to the language which he uses.'² It is for this reason that Plato would banish from the stage of his ideal Republic all vulgar actions and low dialogues—women quarrelling with their husbands, or rogues and cowards 'jesting, scolding, reviling, in drink or out of drink, or otherwise sinning against themselves or others in word or deed, as the manner

¹ *Inf.* xxx. 115-118

² *Ethics*, iv. 14

CANTOS
XXIX 37-
XXX

Review of
Malebolge

of such is.' To hear and see such things breeds a corresponding baseness and vulgarity in the audience.¹

We have now reached the last 'cloister' of this great Circle, and, as already pointed out, it is extremely difficult to discover any principle of gradation on which its ten forms of Fraud are arranged. One would expect, for instance, that Simony, which is a fraud against the Church, would be set lower down than Barratry, which is fraud against the State, and that the Hypocrisy which crucified Christ would be sunk far below Alchemy, which 'apes Nature', but it is not so. Since Fraud is a social sin, it is possible that the classification represents Dante's view of the degrees in which the various forms of this evil undermine and ruin society. As we look back on the awful place, its chief characteristic is undoubtedly its foulness. Dante seems to have strained even his terrible imagination to crowd into its dark pits as much of loathsome and diabolic as they could hold—demons, filth, pitch, serpents, wounds, mutilations, deformities, insanity, leprosy, dropsy, fever—everything that can distort, defile, and eat away the form and features of humanity. The whole place is filled with the sickening stench of the unspeakable corruption. It is not, as Landor and others appear to think, because Dante's imagination delighted in vile images—only those can believe this who never read beyond the *Inferno*, it is simply because he wished to stamp Fraud in all its varieties with the foulness and deformity which he believed

Its Foulness

¹ Republic, iii. 395-398

to be its native and essential characteristics. It is its secrecy and duplicity which compel him to take this serious view of it. An open sin even of the same kind, just because open, was in his judgment clean and wholesome by comparison, at least, it did not rot and mutilate human nature. But 'Fraud is man's peculiar vice,' because its instrument is man's peculiar gift of Reason, it 'cuts the bond of love which Nature makes,' the general knot and fellowship of mankind, and thus secretly undermines the trust of man in man which makes any true brotherhood of humanity possible. To Dante's mind no foulness of imagery was too horrible or loathsome to picture forth such a sin, its only adequate presentment was the Guardian-spirit of this lower Hell—a foul blend of the human, the brute, and the diabolic—the face of a just man, the paws of a beast, and the tail of a serpent tipped with a scorpion's sting

CANTOS
XXIX 37-
XXX
—

CHAPTER XXVI

CIRCLE IX—THE LAKE OF COCYTUS TRAITORS

I Come Traitors to their Kindred

CANTOS
XXXI
XXXII 69
—
Cocytus—
General Plan

As we are now about to enter the Ninth and last Circle, the prison of Traitors, it may be well to remind ourselves of the general plan and structure of this nether Hell. We saw that the three lowest Circles are, so to speak, the underground dungeons of the City of Dis. From the centre of the City a broken precipice leads down to the Circle of Violence, and thence a vast chasm falls to Malebolge, that of Fraud. We have just seen that this Circle consists of ten concentric Moats, all sloping centreward like the tiers of a vast amphitheatre. The centre itself—or, holding by the figure of the amphitheatre, the arena—is a flat plain, thought by some to be about three-quarters of a mile in breadth. In the middle is sunk an enormous well,—one vast final swamp into which drain all the infernal rivers, Acheron, Styx, and Phlegethon, which then form the great frozen lake, or rather cesspool, of Cocytus. It is toward this 'bottom of all guilt' that the travellers are now about to make their way. Turning their backs on the last and lowest dyke of Malebolge, they

strike straight across the plain in silence, Dante still feeling the shame of Virgil's rebuke. They had not gone far when the blast of a horn, so loud it made any thunder faint, startled Dante and caused him to strain his eyes in the direction from which it seemed to come. Through the dim air, 'less than night and less than day,' he soon saw what he took to be the towers of a town, like those which ring round the castle of Montereggioni near Siena. Virgil, however, corrects the error into which the distance and darkness betrayed him: the 'towers' are a range of Giants standing half-sunk in the great well of the next Circle, and what he sees is the upper half of their bodies.¹

The blast of the horn, louder than that blown by Orlando at Roncesvalles, came from Nimrod, the 'mighty hunter before the Lord,' whom Dante, probably on St. Augustine's authority, regards as one of the giants of Scriptural tradition. His face was as large and long as 'the pine-cone of St. Peter's,' a huge bronze cone which originally formed the apex of the Mausoleum of Hadrian or Castle of St. Angelo, but now in the gardens of the Vatican. Toynbee gives its height as seven and a half feet. The part of Nimrod's body visible above the edge of the well was so huge that three Frieslanders, says Dante, could not have reached up to his hair, that is, to his neck. From these data, his height has been variously calculated from fifty-five to seventy feet. As he looks at him, Dante is thankful that Nature has abandoned the creation of such 'executors' of Mars although

CANTOS
XXXI.-
XXXII 69

The Giants
Nimrod and
his Horn

¹ *Inf* xxxi 7-45.

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CANTOS
XXXI -
XXXII. 69

Nimrod's Cry

she continues to produce gigantic animals like elephants and whales, she has rendered them comparatively harmless by withholding the gift of intellect. When Nimrod caught sight of the pilgrims, he greeted them with a clamorous cry

‘ Babel mai amech zabi almi,

of which many interpretations have been attempted. None, however, ought to be sought for, since Dante plainly intends it as the sign of the confusion of tongues which Nimrod was believed to have created at Babel. It is in allusion to the building of this Tower that Dante compares the Giants to the towers which rival families and clans had built in every city of Italy, he saw in these towers the same spirit of pride which produced the Tower of Babel and all the subsequent confusion. It is for this reason too that Virgil calls Nimrod ‘confused soul, and bids him vent his inarticulate passion through his horn. As he says to Dante

‘ Himself he doth accuse,

This one is Nimrod by whose evil thought
One language in the world is not still used
Let us leave him standing and not speak in vain
For even such to him is every language
As his to others, which to none is known ‘¹

This question of language had a peculiar interest for Dante, and led to some curious speculations. In his *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (1 6, 7) he says that the original language was Hebrew, and that this language was preserved by the Shemites only because they

¹ *Inf* XXXI 46-81

took no part in the building of the Tower of Babel When God sent confusion of tongues on the impious builders, 'the same language remained to those alone who were engaged in the same kind of work for instance, one (language) to all the architects, another to those rolling down blocks of stone, another to those preparing the stone, and so it happened to each group of workers And the human race was accordingly divided into as many different languages as there were different branches of the work, and the higher the branch of work the men were engaged in, the ruder and more barbarous was the language they afterwards spoke' The original tongue remained with the Shemites 'in order that our Redeemer (who was, as to His humanity, to spring from them) might use, not the language of confusion, but of grace' This opinion, however, Dante retracted in *Par* xxvi 124, where Adam tells him that the language he spoke was 'all quenched' long before the Tower of Babel was begun

CANTOS
XXXI-
XXXII. 69

Turning to the left, they found, a bowshot off, Ephialtes, one of the Giants of heathen mythology, who piled Ossa on Olympus, and Pelion on Ossa, to scale heaven and dethrone Jove The arms with which once he 'terrified the gods' are now bound with chains, the right behind his back, the left in front, yet all manacled as he was, when he shook himself as an earthquake shakes a tower, Dante would have died for fear had he not seen his chains He was anxious to see Briareus of the hundred Briareus hands, but Virgil replies that he is too far off, and that he is bound like Ephialtes, only more ferocious

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CANTOS
XXXI-
XXXII 89
Antæus.

in his aspect. Meantime it was necessary to hasten to Antæus. This Giant had taken no part in the war against the gods, and was therefore left unbound. He was the least ferocious of the Giants, as Chiron was of the Centaurs, and Virgil hoped to persuade him to lift them down from the plain to the ice of Cocytus far below. He did not scruple to flatter his pride by recalling his prowess in slaying a thousand lions in the valley of the Bagrada, where Scipio Africanus won glory by his great victory over Hannibal, and by suggesting that the war with the gods would have gone differently had he joined in it. Even under this praise, Antæus 'curled his lip' in scorn, and only gave way when Virgil promised that Dante would 'restore his fame' in the upper world. The 'hands whose great grasp Hercules once felt' laid hold of Virgil, Virgil in turn laid hold of Dante, making of the two 'one bundle', and then the giant form, stooping as Carisenda, the leaning tower of Bologna, seems to stoop when a light cloud passes over it, set them on the ice far beneath his feet, and rose again like 'the mast of some great ammiral'.¹

The Giants—
Symbols of
Pride

The Giants are set here as Guardians of this 'bottom of all guilt,' for two reasons. First, they are symbols of that pride which cannot brook the sovereignty of God. It is the Circle of Traitors, the infernal palace, so to speak, of Lucifer, 'the Emperor of the dolorous realm,' who sits on his throne of pain far within, while they guard the doors. 'In the same way as the heavenly choirs of angels surround

¹ Inf. XXXI. 82-145

the throne of God, so here the giants close in round their chief, Lucifer, as though they were his body-guard.' As he sought to overthrow God in Heaven, so had they fought against Him from the earth, and in him and them alike, the source and fountain of their treachery was pride. This is plain from the next division of the poem. When Dante reaches the First Terrace of Purgatory on which the sin of Pride is expiated, he finds carved upon its marble pavement examples of this sin, and among them Lucifer like lightning falling from Heaven, Briareus transfixed with the thunderbolt, the limbs of the Giants scattered on the earth, and Nimrod at the foot of his Tower gazing bewildered at 'the people who were proud with him in Shinar' ¹. The second reason for their being set here is undoubtedly to indicate the enormity of the sin of this 'lowest pool of the universe' 'Treachery is a gigantic version of fraud, by which "is forgotten that love which Nature makes, and also that which afterwards is added, giving birth to special trust" (*Inf* xi 61-63), hence the guardians of this circle are monstrosities in magnified human shape' ².

Another symbol of the greatness of the sin is the depth of this well of Cocytus. Just as Geryon had to bear the travellers down the great precipice between Violence and Fraud, so Antæus has to lift them far down to the still lower deep that exists in

Depth of the
Well of
Cocytus

¹ *Purg* xii 25-30. Pride is not elsewhere referred to in the *Inferno*. It is the lowest sin in Hell, in the *Purgatorio* it is also lowest, till Pride is conquered on the First Terrace, no other sin can be purged out of human nature.

² Edmund G. Gardner's *Dante*, p. 99.

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CANTOS
XXXI -
XXXII 69
—
Symbol of the
Ice

Fraud itself The most significant symbol of all, however, is that Cocytus is a lake of ice, frozen by the flapping of the six bat-like wings of Lucifer who is embedded at the centre Never, says Dante, did Don or Danube in winter cover itself with so thick a veil, if mountains had fallen upon it, 'even at the edge 'twould not have given a creak' The symbolism of this ice has already been pointed out The river Phlegethon, which flows down through the Circles of Violence and Fraud, consists of hot blood evil as those sins are, they have the excuse of being committed in some heat of passion But for Treachery no such excuse exists, it is a sin of cold blood, possible only when all warm and generous feeling has been frozen out of the human heart

The Four
Rings of
Cocytus

Before we start to cross the frozen Lake, it may be well to have its divisions clearly before our minds The ice apparently slopes downward to the centre, and the souls of Traitors are sunk in it to different depths, or frozen in different attitudes, according to the kind of 'Treachery of which they have been guilty Four qualities are distinguished, and these divide the Circle into four concentric Rings which shade into one another without any outward and visible line of demarcation

I Caina,
Traitors to
Kindred.

I. The outermost Ring is named Caina after Cain, who slew his brother, and here Traitors to Kindred receive their deserts There is, however, some uncertainty as to the exact mode of their punishment Dante's own statement is that they were 'livid as far as where shame appears,' which some take to

mean from a little below the waist. If this meaning could be maintained, it would certainly show more clearly the gradation of guilt by the different depths to which the souls are sunk, which undoubtedly seems to be Dante's idea. Nevertheless there are two things which shut us up to the interpretation that the face is meant, or rather the neck, where the blush of shame first appears. The first is that Dante compares the souls here to frogs with their 'muzzles' out of the water, and the second that one of the wretches begs him to be careful not to trample on their heads, plainly implying that only their heads are out. Their teeth chatter with the cold, their heads hang downwards, and the tears reveal the misery of the heart within.

CANTOS
XXXI-
XXXII 69

II Antenora, the name of the second Ring, is taken from Antenor, the Trojan who was believed in the Middle Ages to have betrayed his native city to the Greeks. This belief, which has no ground in Homer or Virgil, seems to have sprung from the fact that Antenor counselled his countrymen to avoid war by the restoration of Helen. The souls here are Traitors to their Country, and their punishment is immersion in the ice up to the neck. Some writers think they are a little lower than the preceding class, part of their heads being frozen in. They too have their heads bent downward. Being nearer the centre of the Lake, their treachery is regarded as more heinous.

II Antenora,
Traitors to
Country

III The third Ring, Tolomea, receives its name from Ptolomeus, Captain of the city of Jericho, of whom we are told in 1 Maccabees xvi 11-17, that he

III Tolomea,
Traitors to
Friends and
Guests

CANTOS
XXXI -
XXXII 69
—

invited Simon the Maccabee and his two sons, Mattathias and Judas, to a friendly feast, and had them treacherously slain. It is therefore the prison-house of Traitors to Friends and Guests. Like the souls in the two previous Rings, they are sunk up to the neck in ice, but with this difference, that, whereas the former have their faces bent downwards, these have theirs turned up, in such fashion that their tears lie in the hollows of the eyes, freeze into a mask of ice, and thus close all outlet for their grief. More terrible still, this Ring has oftentimes the grim 'privilege' of receiving the souls of such traitors before their bodies die.

IV *Giudecca*,
Traitors to
Lords and
Benefactors

IV The central Ring, the very heart of Hell, takes its name, *Giudecca*, from Judas, the betrayer of Christ. It is, therefore, the 'place' of Traitors to their Lords and Benefactors, who are completely embedded in the ice, 'like straws in glass'. The only exceptions are the four arch-traitors, three human and one angelic, for whom is reserved a still more dreadful doom. In the exact centre of the Circle and of the earth rises, from the waist up, Lucifer, traitor to his Lord and Benefactor, God. In his central mouth—for he has three—he devours eternally Judas Iscariot, traitor to his Lord and Benefactor, Christ. In the two side mouths writhe Brutus and Cassius, traitors to their Lord and Benefactor, Cæsar. In other words, this central group consists of Traitors to God in Heaven and to his representatives on earth, Christ and Cæsar, Church and State.

Now, the order of these Rings indicates the deep-

ening guilt of the four kinds of Treachery, and the principle of classification is interesting. We are somewhat surprised, for example, to find treachery to one's own kin—say fratricide like Cain's—regarded as a less heinous sin than treason to one's country. Is not the bond of flesh and blood closer and more sacred than that even of native land? Nevertheless the universal instinct proves that Dante is right. Whenever a country is in danger, it calls its citizens to sacrifice, if need be, every tie of home and kindred for her defence, saying in effect 'He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me, and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me.' Instinctively we feel that to sacrifice family for country is noble, and to sacrifice country for family is a base treachery to the higher claim. But if country is thus greater than kindred, is it not still greater than friendship?—yet traitors to friends are set in the third Ring, as if worthy of a darker doom. The reason seems to lie in a principle laid down as far back as Canto xi 52-66, namely, that both kin and country are bonds created for us by Nature, independently of our choice, whereas just this is the mark of friendship, that it is a bond of our own creation. By the very act of choosing a friend, we create 'a special faith,' as Dante says, and he regards treason to a faith which we ourselves have called into existence as a more heinous sin than treachery to a mere involuntary bond of Nature. It is somewhat perplexing to find, however, that the lowest place of all, the central heart of Hell, is reserved for treachery to Lords and

CANTOS
XXXI.-
XXXII. 69
—
Principle of
Classification.

CANTOS
XXXI -
XXXII. 69
—

Benefactors this surely is not so sacred a bond as those of family, country, and friendship? Probably the reason is that friendship is usually a bond between equals, whereas when one who is rightful Lord stoops to his inferior and loads him with his favours, there is an element of grace in his condescension which, in Dante's view, gives to treachery its blackest baseness. Such a Lord and Benefactor was God to Lucifer, Christ to Judas, and Cæsar to Brutus and Cassius, and Dante believed that human wickedness could go no further than to betray such a union of authority and grace.

First Ring—
Caïna
Traitors to
Kin

When Antæus set the travellers down on the ice, Dante stood looking up at the great wall of enclosing rock, until a voice startled him

'Look how thou passest
Take heed that thou tread not with thy soles
On the heads of the wretched weary brothers'

Turning his eyes to the ice, he saw the souls of Traitors to their Kindred, 'livid up to where shame appears,' and 'setting their teeth unto the note of storks.' This reference to storks is not likely to be accidental. The stork was regarded in the Middle Ages as symbolic of family affection and piety, and all that these Traitors to their Kindred have left of likeness to the stork is this chattering of their teeth like the rattling of his bill. Every face was bent downwards, and the heart's anguish flowed forth in tears. Almost at his feet Dante saw 'the wretched weary brothers,' one of whom had begged him not to step on them. From a neighbouring traitor he

Alessandro and
Napoleone
degli Alberti.

learns that they are Napoleone and Alessandro, sons of Alberto degli Alberti, Count of Mangona, who quarrelled and slew each other in a dispute concerning their inheritance, part of which lay in the valley of the Bisenzio near Florence. They are, as it were, locked in the same death-struggle in which they took each other's lives, pressed breast to breast, and their heads so close that their hair is mingled together. On Dante's asking who they are, they lift their bent faces to look at him, and a gush of sudden tears blinds their eyes. Perhaps the sight of one free of the ice roused the bitter sense of all they might have been, and then the icy wind of that region of hate froze their tears together, the old blood-feud broke out afresh, and in blind rage they butted each other with their heads 'like two he-goats' ¹

CANTOS
XXXI -
XXXII 69

So absorbed were they in their blind hatred and fury, that they gave no answer to Dante's question, but a traitor close by is only too glad to tell who they are. This soul had lost both ears through the cold, perhaps because his ears had been cropped for his misdeeds on earth, or to indicate, as Plumptre says, that 'those who yield to hatred lose the power of listening to the voice of reason or conscience.' The power of listening to evil, however, remains unimpaired, for this traitor overflows with a malicious delight in telling the worst he has ever heard of others. Of the two brothers he assures Dante that he may search Caina through without finding another soul worthier to be 'fixed in the jelly,' as

Camiciotto de
Pazzi

¹ Inf. xxxii 19-60

CANTOS
XXXI -
XXXII 69

he jocosely calls the ice. not Mordred, who slew his father King Arthur and was slain by him; not Focaccia, whose murder of a kinsman is said to have created the Black and White factions in Pistoja, not Sassol Mascheroni, the Florentine, his too near neighbour in the ice, who was rolled through the streets in a cask studded with nails and afterwards beheaded, for the treacherous murder of his brother's only son, whose inheritance he wished to secure This malicious soul, so ready to say the worst he can of the miserable brothers and the rest, is eager to screen himself behind the greater guilt of another, and he a kinsman of his own In mock politeness, to save Dante the trouble of asking, he volunteers his own name

Carlino de'
Pazzi

'Know that I was Camicione de' Pazzi,
And am waiting for Carlino to excuse me'

This Camicione had treacherously slain a kinsman, but he rejoices that the darker deed which Carlino, a member of his own house of the Pazzi, should yet commit, would make his own crime seem light in comparison This darker deed was treason to his country In 1302 this Carlino de' Pazzi held on behalf of the Whites the castle of Piano di Trevigne in the Valdarno, and betrayed it to the Blacks for a bribe This treachery being still in the future, Dante takes this way of assigning him his place in Antenora by anticipation The joy of Camicione in his darker doom is meant to show how completely the natural feelings of kinship can be corrupted The rich man in the parable had grace enough

left to wish to save his brethren from coming into his place of torment, but this unnatural soul welcomes the deeper damnation of his kinsman because by comparison it makes his own sin appear trivial and pardonable¹

CANTOS
XXVI -
XXVII 69

Inf xxxii 67 72

CHAPTER XXVII

CIRCLE IX — THE LAKE OF COCYTUS TRAITORS

II Antenora Traitors to their Country

CANTOS AT this point Dante passes on into the Ring of
XXXII 70 Antenora, in which Traitors to their Country are
XXXIII 90 frozen up to the neck in ice, probably a little deeper
— than the souls in the Caina. And here he comes
Second Ring— upon a group composed for the most part of men
Antenora infamous throughout Italy for their treachery in
Traitors to the terrible feuds of Guelphs and Ghibellines. He
Country had scarcely entered it when—by 'will, or destiny, or
 chance,' he knew not which—his foot struck violently
 against the face of one of the wretches, who not un-
 naturally broke out into angry remonstrances

Bocca degli
Abati

Weeping he growled: 'Why dost thou trample me?
Unless thou comest to increase the vengeance
For Montaperti, why dost thou molest me?'

The reference to Montaperti, the disastrous battle in which the Florentine Guelphs were defeated in 1260, at once arrests Dante's attention, and he begs Virgil to give him time to clear up a doubt. We saw in the City of Dis how Farinata, the leader of the victorious Ghibellines, reminded Dante that his Guelph forefathers had that day been on the losing

side It is obvious that from the first he suspects who this soul is. While the battle was in progress, this Bocca degli Abati rode up behind Jacopo de' Pazzi, the Guelph standard-bearer, and struck off with his sword the hand which held the banner of his party, and when the Guelphs saw their standard fall, they broke and fled. Although Dante had abandoned the party to which his ancestors belonged, so base an act of treachery against it stirred him into a passion of indignation. Suspecting who he was, he offers him—ironically perhaps—fame on earth, if he will disclose his name. The traitor, like all the rest in this Circle, knowing only too well that fame on earth meant infamy, of which he had enough already, orders Dante away—he wants to be pestered no more. Whereupon follows one of the strangest incidents in Hell. Dante falls upon him almost literally tooth and nail, seizes him 'by the scalp behind,' and threatens savagely that he will not leave a hair on his head if he do not straightway yield up his name. Already, indeed, he has torn out several handfuls, when a soul close by, annoyed by the 'barking' of the tortured wretch, cries out,

CANTOS
XXXII 70-
XXXIII 90

Dante's
Indignation

'What ails thee, Bocca?
Is it not enough to clatter with thy jaws,
But thou must bark? what devil touches thee?

Dante has now got his name in spite of him, and tells the 'accursed traitor' that he will shame him on earth with the news of where he found him. In justice, however, to Bocca, it must be remembered

CANTOS
XXXII 70-
XXXIII 90
—

that he did not belong to the Guelph party, nor was he at this battle altogether with his will. Being a Ghibelline, the Guelphs were afraid to leave him and other members of his party behind in Florence, lest they should take advantage of their absence to foment discords. They therefore compelled them to go with them to the war against Siena. Naturally their sympathies were with the other side, among whom were many of their own party who had been banished from Florence. When Bocca struck off the hand of the Guelph standard-bearer, and with his Ghibelline friends rode over to the enemy, doubtless there was treachery in the act, but it was not treachery to his own party. We might even ask whether the real treachery would not have been to remain on the Guelph side and fight against the Ghibelline party to which he belonged. Perhaps it was just some such doubt as this that Dante asked Virgil to give him time to solve.¹

Enraged at being identified, Bocca takes his revenge by naming the traitors in his neighbourhood, beginning with him who had revealed his secret. To Dante,

'Begone, he answered, 'and tell what thou wilt,
But be not silent, if thou issue hence,
Of him who had just now his tongue so prompt
He weepeth here the silver of the French
'I saw, thus canst thou tell, "him of Duera,
There where the sinners stand out in the cold "'

Buoso da
Duera

The reference is to Buoso da Duera, a Ghibelline of Cremona, who in 1265 betrayed the Ghibellines as

¹ Inf. xxxii 73 111 See Napier's *Florentine History*, Bk I chap I

Bocca was believed to have betrayed the Guelphs. Charles of Anjou having been invited by the Pope to wrest the kingdom of Naples from Manfred, son of Frederick II, sent an army into Italy from the North under Count Guy de Montfort. Manfred ordered the Ghibellines of Lombardy to oppose its passage, nevertheless it reached the city of Parma without striking a blow. This was attributed to the treachery of this Buoso da Duera, one of the leaders of the Ghibelline forces. 'It is said,' writes Villani, 'that one Master Buoso, of the house of da Duera, of Cremona, for money which he received from the French, gave counsel in such wise that the host of Manfred was not there to contest the pass, as had been arranged, wherfor the people of Cremona afterwards destroyed the said family of the Duera in fury'¹ Dante, who saw in the intervention of France the ruin of his country, must have regarded this act of treachery with peculiar detestation, and he may be pardoned if it added a touch of personal bitterness to his hatred to remember that the ruin of his own fortunes began with the interference in Florentine politics of another French prince, Charles of Valois, whose only weapon was 'the lance with which Judas jousted'²

CANTOS
XXXII. 70-
XXXIII. 90

Bocca names four other traitors in his immediate neighbourhood

Four other
Traitors

'If thou shouldst questioned be who else was there,
Thou hast beside thee him of Beccherin,
Whose gorget Florence slit asunder

¹ Villani, vii 4, *Inf* xxxii 112-117

² *Purg* xx 70 78

CANTOS
XXXII. 70-
XXXIII. 90

Gianni de' Soldanier, I think, may be
Yonder with Ganellon and Tribaldello,
Who opened Faenza while it was asleep'¹

The first named of the four was Tesauro, Abbot of Vallombrosa, of the noble house of Beccheria in Pavia. He was put to death by the Florentines on the charge of intriguing with the exiled Ghibellines. Villani evidently believed the charge to be false 'this (the treason) by torture they made him confess, and wickedly in the piazza of Santo Apollinare by the outcry of the people they beheaded him, not regarding his dignity nor his holy orders, for the which thing the commonwealth of Florence and the Florentines were excommunicated by the Pope.' Gianni de' Soldanieri is set here because, although a Ghibelline, he deserted his party and headed the Guelph commons in their revolt against the nobles after the defeat and death of Manfred at Benevento. Villani says his motive was to 'rise in ostate', yet, strangely enough, he names him elsewhere, with Dante and others, as a man whom Florence had treated with great ingratitude. Ganellon is a traitor of romance rather than of history. By his treacherous advice, Charlemagne disregarded the blast of Orlando's horn eight miles away, and left his rear-guard to destruction at Roncesvalles. Tribaldello or Tebaldello was so infamous a traitor that songs were written and sung about him throughout Romagna. To gratify a private grudge against a Ghibelline family of Faenza, he opened the gates of that city to *his* Guelph enemies during the night, and thus

¹ *Inf.* xxxiii. 118-123

¹ *Villani*, vi. 65, vii. 14, xii. 44

brought about a horrible massacre of his fellow-citizens

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XXXIII. 90

Turning now to the moral significance, in addition to the torment of the ice no small part of the punishment of the souls in this region is their desire to remain unknown, unrecognized To Dante's mind, the love of fame was a natural, healthy, and honourable desire, if duly and wisely gratified According to Aristotle, his great ethical authority, one of the virtues is 'Magnanimity, which is a moderator and acquirer of great honours and fame'¹ All through the *Inferno* he assumes that the desire for fame exists even in the lost, and time after time offers to bear back some record of their names to the upper air As he descends to the lower Circles, however, he finds an increasing desire for oblivion. The first sign of this desire is when the pander, Venedico Caccianimico, lowers his head in hope to escape recognition Vanni Fucci, the thief, is ashamed that Dante has caught him in his misery Guido of Montefeltro, who gave the evil counsel, tells Dante that he would not speak a word of himself if he thought he would escape from Hell and carry the story of his sin back to earth But it is in this Circle of Cocytus that this desire for oblivion is strongest Not one has the healthy human wish to be remembered They seem to be at last conscious of the baseness of their sin, the scorn of their fellows weighs them down, and their one relief would be to be forgotten Obviously this is at once part of their punishment and proof of the vileness of their crime,

Punishment

Longing for
Oblivion

¹ *Comm.* iv. 17

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XXXIII 90
—

dreadful indeed, in Dante's view, must be the sin which freezes in men's hearts the natural and honourable desire to be known and remembered. In the Ante-Hell above, the punishment of the Neutrals is that they are forgotten—'no fame of them the world permits to be', here at the other extreme of Hell, the punishment of Traitors is that they are *not* forgotten, the world holds their memory in an immortal hatred and contempt.

Dante's
strange attack
on Bocca.

Dante's own conduct here is not easy to understand. It certainly seems far from dignified, to say the least, to fall upon a wretch who cannot defend himself, and tear out his hair by handfuls. Is the poet, we cannot help wondering, becoming infected with the spirit of the place? Is the wind of Lucifer's wings freezing up his better feelings? We may be sure that this was not his own view of his conduct. From the moment Montaperti was named, he suspected that the 'accursed traitor' was before him through whom the battle was lost and Florence almost destroyed, and Dante invented the incident for the express purpose of showing his determination to tear the mask from a traitor, and hold up his treachery to the everlasting hatred and scorn which it so richly deserved. Nevertheless, I cannot think that he means to set his conduct here in an altogether favourable light. There are one or two things which seem to hint that, while his indignation against traitors to their country was right and even noble, he was not unconscious of something unworthy in the excessive passion and fury into which it carried him away. In the next Canto we shall

find a similar unworthiness in his treatment of Frate Alberigo, a traitor to his guests. We must remember that Dante's aim in the *Commedia* is not simply to reveal the sins of others, but also to confess his own. He may have known only too well that his very hatred of certain sins betrayed him into unworthy ways of showing his abhorrence of them. At all events, there is one point of great significance which is usually overlooked, namely, Virgil's attitude to this violent attack on Bocca. As we have again and again seen, Virgil is Reason personified, and as such time after time expresses his approval or disapproval of Dante's conduct. When he flung Filippo Argenti back into the mire of Styx, Virgil embraced him warmly for his indignation. On the other hand, on several occasions he rebuked him sharply—for instance, for weeping with pity for the doom of the Diviners, and for listening to a vulgar brawl between a liar and a forger. It cannot therefore be without meaning that Virgil now stands silent, neither approving nor condemning. Dante seems to have felt that his furious outburst of indignation, if not worthy of blame, was at least no matter for praise.

Just near the point where Antenora passes into Tolomea, Dante comes upon the most horrible scene in all Hell

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Count
Ugolino and
Archbishop
Ruggieri of
Pisa

I saw two frozen in one hole,
So that the one head to the other was a cup,
And even as bread for hunger is devoured,
So the uppermost his teeth into the other set
There where the brain is joined unto the nape

Dante asks the one uppermost why he devours the other in such bestial fashion, promising to 'repay

CANTOS
XXXII 70-
XXXIII 90
—

him in the world above'—that is, by recording his story—provided his hatred be found to be just. Whereupon the cannibal soul lifted his mouth,

wiping it upon the hair
Of the head that he behind had wasted,

and began his story. The very memory of it wrung his heart with grief, but he was willing to 'speak and weep together' if his words would 'bear fruit of infamy' to the traitor whom he gnawed.

Count
Ugolino's
Treachery

His name was Count Ugolino della Gherardesca of Pisa, whose fate had sent a thrill of horror through all Tuscany, and he whom he devoured was the man who consigned him to that fate, Ruggieri degli Ubaldini, Archbishop of that city. In 1284, in the great naval battle of Meloria, the Genoese crushed Pisa as a maritime power, and Count Ugolino, one of the three Pisan admirals, was regarded as a principal cause of the disaster by having withdrawn from the engagement at a critical moment,—his enemies said in treachery. Whether this charge is true or false, there is no doubt whatever that he took advantage of the misfortunes of his country to establish his own power. Pisa never fully recovered from this defeat. Many of her galleys were captured or sunk, five thousand of her citizens were slain, and the prisoners are variously estimated at from ten to fifteen thousand. It became a proverb that he who wished to see Pisa must go to Genoa. Soon after the disaster, the neighbouring cities of Florence and Lucca entered into a league with Genoa for the complete destruction of the unfortunate republic. In its distress and to escape

annihilation, it made Count Ugolino podestà, in spite of the suspicion of his treachery at Meloria, regarding him as the only man who could meet the crisis. And this not because of his virtues; rather because of his very ambition and unscrupulousness. As the head of the Guelph party in Pisa, he was the most likely man to treat successfully with the Guelph city of Florence. His first step was to detach Florence from the anti-Pisan league by yielding to her certain castles, and by banishing the Ghibellines from the city. Lucca was next bought off by a similar cession of the castles on Monte di S. Giuliano, 'the mountain for which the Pisans cannot see Lucca.' Doubtless all this was necessary to save the republic from destruction, nevertheless it equally served the schemes of his ambition. To consolidate his power and keep away the Ghibellines taken prisoner at Meloria, he threw every obstacle in the way of their release by ransom, and most of them died in captivity. All this roused a bitter feeling against him in Pisa, which saw its castles lost, its citizens banished or left to perish in imprisonment, and its liberties outraged. His grandson, Nino Visconti, having tried to curb his ambition, was treacherously banished from the city, and the Count betrayed the Guelph party by entering into an alliance with the Ghibellines. The head of this party was the Archbishop Ruggieri, who was playing the same game of ambition as the Count, but with greater cunning. Having expelled the Guelphs, the Archbishop turned upon Ugolino, 'giving the people to understand that he had betrayed Pisa, and given up their fortresses to the Florentines and

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'The Tower of
Famine'

Ugolino's Sons
and Grand
sons.

the Lucchese' His palace was stormed and himself with two sons and two grandsons cast into prison. After eight months of captivity (July 1288 to March 1289), the Archbishop nailed up the door of their prison, cast the keys into the Arno, and deliberately starved them to death 'And albeit,' writes Villani, 'the said Count demanded with cries to be shriven, yet did they not grant him a friar or priest to confess him' 'Thus, says the same author, 'was the traitor betrayed by the traitor'¹ The tower in which they died belonged to the Gualandi family, mentioned in this passage It is now destroyed, but its site is pointed out in the Piazza dei Cavalieri It was originally known as the Tower of the Seven Ways, but in consequence of this tragedy it was ever after called the Tower of Hunger The story as told by Dante is another, and perhaps the most striking, example of his love of constructing an imaginative ending of a human life What happened inside the tower after the door was nailed up, could, of course, be known to none, but the poet's fierce and terrible imagination penetrates the secret of those last days and nights of despair and madness The members of his family who perished with the Count were his two youngest sons, Gaddo and Uguccione, and his two grandsons, Nino, called 'Il Brigata,' and Anselmuccio, 'darling little Anselm'² In the dark March

¹ Villani, vii 121, 128

² Chaucer in his *Monkes Tale* heightens the pathos by making the children mere infants

'And with him ben his litel children three,
The eldest scarcely five yere was of age
Alas' fortune it was gret crueltee
Swiche briddes for to put in swiche a cage

In reality, Anselm, the youngest, was about fifteen

morning before the dawn, Ugolino tells that he awoke oppressed with a dream which warned him of their coming fate. His sons had similar premonitions, for he heard them weeping in their sleep and asking for bread. In his dream he saw the Archbishop hunting with sleuth-hounds a wolf and his cubs upon the mountain between Pisa and Lucca. The wolf and cubs were Ugolino himself and his sons—perhaps, as some think, with a reference to the meaning of Guelph, wolf. The sleuth-hounds were the three Ghibelline houses, the Gualandi, Sismondi, and Lanfranchi, and perhaps in calling them ‘gaunt, eager, and well-trained,’ Dante refers to the starvation by which their victims were to be done to death. The chase was a short one—he saw the flanks of the wolves torn by their sharp teeth. The passage, however, must be quoted in full. Savage Landor declares that the thirty lines from xxxiii 46 are ‘unequalled by any other continuous thirty in the whole dominions of poetry’—though, indeed, he also says that the features of Ugolino are ‘reflected full in Dante,—hard, cruel, inflexible, malignant’

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XXXII 70-
XXXIII. 90

‘Thou wilt that I renew
A desperate grief, which wrings my heart already
To think of only, ere I speak of it,
But if my words be seed that may bear fruit
Of infamy to the traitor whom I gnaw,
Speaking and weeping thou shalt see together
I know not who thou art, nor by what mode
Thou hast come down here, but a Florentine
Thou seemest to me truly when I hear thee
Thou hast to know I was Count Ugolino,
And this one is the Archbishop Ruggieri

Ugolino's
Narrative.

CANTOS
XXXII 70-
XXXIII 90

His Dream

**The nailing up
of the door of
the Tower.**

Now I will tell thee why I am such a neighbour.
That, by effect of his malicious thoughts,
Trusting in him I was made prisoner,
And after put to death, I need not say,
But that which thou canst not have heard,
That is to say, how cruel was my death,
Thou shalt hear, and know if he has wronged me
A narrow opening within the mew,
Which has because of me the title of Famine,
And in which others still must be shut up,
Had shown me through its crevice many moons
Already, when I dreamed the evil dream
Which of the future rent for me the veil
This one appeared to me as lord and master,
Hunting the wolf and whelps upon the mountain
For which the Pisans cannot Lucca see
Along with hounds, gaunt, and keen, and trained,
Gualandi with Sismondi and Lanfranchi
He had sent out before him to the front
After brief course seemed to me forespent
The father and the sons, and with the sharp teeth
Meseemed I saw their flanks ripped open
When I before the morrow was awake,
Moaning within their sleep I heard my sons,
Who were with me, and asking after bread
Right cruel art thou, if already thou grieve not,
Thinking of what my heart foreboded me,
And if thou weep not, what art thou wont to weep at?
They were awake now, and the hour drew nigh
At which our food used to be brought to us,
And through his dream each one had some misgiving,
And I heard muffled up the door below
Of the horrible tower, whereat without a word
I gazed into the faces of my sons
I wept not, I within so turned to stone
They wept, and darling little Anselm mine
Said "Thou gazest so father, what doth ail thee?"
But not a tear I shed, nor answer made
All that day, nor yet the night thereafter,

Until another sun rose on the world
As now a little glimmer made its way
Into the dolorous prison, and I discerned
In their four faces the aspect of my own,
Both of my hands I bit for anguish
And they, thinking I did it from desire
Of eating, of a sudden raised themselves,
And said "Father, much less pain 'twill give us,
If thou wilt eat of us thou didst clothe us with
This miserable flesh, and do thou strip it off"
I calmed me then, not to make them more sad
That day and the next we all were silent
Ah, obdurate earth! why didst thou not open?
When we had come to the fourth day, Gaddo
Threw himself down outstretched before my feet
Saying "My father, why dost thou not help me?"
There he died, and even as thou seest me,
Saw I the three fall, one by one, between
The fifth day and the sixth whence I betook me,
Already blind, to groping over each
And two days called them after they were dead,
Then fasting had more power than grief.¹

This last line is so ambiguous that it has become a battlefield of commentators. It certainly may mean ^{Meaning of last line} nothing more than that Ugolino died of hunger, not of grief, nevertheless the idea is not to be dismissed too lightly that the delirium of starvation overcame the father's anguish, and that he died devouring the dead bodies of his own children. If this is Dante's meaning, it would give a peculiar and horrible appropriateness to the savage cannibalism in which he found the Count absorbed he now devours to all eternity the man whose inhuman cruelty made him so far forget his fatherhood as to devour his own flesh

¹ Inf. xxxii 124-xxxiii 78

CANTOS
XXXII 70
XXXIII 90

and blood. It would show us also that to Ugolino himself the worst torture of Hell was not the ice, but the haunting intolerable memory, never to be shaken off, of the unnatural crime to which famine drove him. Obviously Dante means to represent him as a man who, in spite of his sins against his country, was deeply and tenderly attached to his own offspring. We can see the stony anguish of his face as he watches his children die round him of starvation. In the grey morning of the second day he bites his hands in agony, and then calms himself 'not to make them more sad'. The cry of 'my darling little Anselm' sounds in his ears yet. His sons are so tenderly attached to him, that they offer him their flesh to eat. To such a man the memory of so unnatural a crime would be unbearable, and his one relief would be to exercise this inhuman and brutish appetite upon the wretch who had created it. The moment his story is ended, he turns to his 'fierce repast'.

When he had said this, with eyes distorted
He seized again the wretched skull with his teeth,
Which, like a dog's, upon the bone were strong.¹

Was the Count
a Traitor to
his Country?

There is also considerable doubt as to the precise treachery of which the Count was guilty. Some writers regard it as the driving of his grandson, Nino Visconti, into exile, but in that case he should rather be in the preceding Ring. It is plain that the Pisans

¹ Against this interpretation Rev. H. F. Fozer says, 'After eight days' fasting eating flesh is an impossibility, as a competent medical authority has definitely stated. Besides this, Buti, himself a Pisan, relates that after eight days—i.e. at the expiration of the time mentioned by Dante—the bodies were taken out dead and he gives no hint of any of them having been mutilated.'

themselves regarded the cession of their castles to Florence and Lucca as an act of treachery to the city, although Dante speaks doubtfully of it.

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XXXII 70-
XXXIII 90

If Count Ugolino had the fame
Of having betrayed thee of thy castles

The truth seems to be that we are not to look for the treason in this particular act or that, it consisted in the way in which Ugolino used the misfortunes of his country for the ends of his own ambition, and intrigued with whichever party, Guelph or Ghibeline, promised at the moment to support his power. It is indeed questionable whether, in spite of the horror of his end, we should waste much pity on him. He was, says Napier, 'stained with the ambition and darker vices of his age, like other potent chiefs he sought to enslave his country and checked at nothing in his impetuous career. he was accused of many crimes, of poisoning his own nephew, of failing in war, making a disgraceful peace, of flying shamefully, perhaps traitorously, at Meloria, and of obstructing all negotiations with Genoa for the return of his imprisoned countrymen. Like most others of his rank in those frenzied times he belonged more to faction than his country, and made the former subservient to his own ambition'.¹ Obviously Dante regards the Archbishop as his fellow in treachery, and more than his fellow in cruelty, and it is probable that he chose the two, not because they were much worse than others of their rank, but simply because they were well-known examples of

¹ *Florentine History*, Bk 1 chap xii

CANTOS
XXXII. 70-
XXXIII. 90

God's Judg-
ment
threatened
upon Pisa.

the way in which, in every city of Italy, noble and churchman alike betrayed country and party in the high game which they played for place and power.

Nevertheless, it is to be noticed that the betrayed city is not relieved of its own responsibility. Dante turns indignantly upon Pisa, whose citizens had supported the Archbishop in his inhuman cruelty. Granted that the Count had the name of having betrayed his city in the cession of her castles, was that any reason, he asks, for destroying his innocent sons? He calls it the 'new Thebes,'¹ a city constantly referred to in the *Commedia* on account of the horrors of bloodshed and cruelty of which it was the scene. Since her neighbours are slow to punish this 'disgrace to the people of the fan land where the "si" doth sound,'² Dante summons Nature herself to become the minister of justice: let the islands Capraia and Gorgona opposite the mouth of the Arno, block up the river and drown every soul in the sinful city! Nature, of course, went on her careless way, unmoved by the invocation, nevertheless there were many who saw in the misfortunes which soon befell Pisa the judgment of God upon such crimes. Villani, after relating the story of Ugolino's doom, adds 'For this cruelty the Pisans were strongly blamed by the whole world, wherever it was known, not so

¹ 'The tradition runs that Pisa was founded by Pelops, son of King Tantalus of Thebes, although it derived its name from "the Olympic Pisa on the banks of the Alpheus"' (Longfellow)

² That is, of course Italy. In *De Vulg. Elog.* i. 8 10, Dante after distinguishing three of the Romance languages by their affirmative particles, *oc*, *oi*, and *si*, claims superiority for the last because 'the founders of grammar have taken *si* as the adverb of affirmation, which seems to confer a kind of precedence on the Italians, who say *si*'

much for the Count, who for his crimes and treasons was perhaps worthy of such a death, but for his sons and grandsons, who were young lads, and innocent, and this sin, committed by the Pisans, did not go unpunished, as in due time hereafter may be found¹ Whether in consequence of such crimes or not, it is certain that from this time forward Pisa gradually sank. Her maritime power never recovered from the disaster of Meloria, and after a long and stubborn struggle she succumbed to the superior strength of her great neighbour and rival, Florence On such a decline and fall Dante would assuredly have looked with the eyes of the Hebrew prophets, never for a moment doubting that it was the just and inevitable judgment of God upon such inhuman crime as is narrated in this Canto We shall see in the closing lines that Genoa, Pisa's conqueror on the sea, is similarly denounced, and this by no accident The two great rivals may struggle as they please for supremacy, but to Dante's mind they have within the breasts of their citizens a corruption of cruelty and treachery which will at last sink both into a common decay.

CANTOS
XXXII 70-
XXXIII 90
—

¹ *Villani*, vii 128

CHAPTER XXVIII

CIRCLE IX —THE LAKE OF COCYTUS TRAITORS

III Tolomea Traitors to Friends and Guests

CANTO
XXVIII
91-157

Third Ring—
Tolomea
Traitors to
Friends and
Guests

WE pass now to the Third Ring, close to the edge of which the Count and the Archbishop are frozen, as if they almost belonged to it. It is called Tolomea, and is the prison of Traitors to Friends and Guests. Its name, as we have seen, is probably taken from Ptolomeus, whose treachery is narrated in 1 *Maccabees*, xvi 11-17. It was, indeed, treachery of a double dye, the victims being at once his kindred and his guests. This Ptolomeus was at the time 'captain in the plain of Jericho,' and in the hope of gaining the country for himself he determined to clear out of his path his father-in-law, Simon the High Priest, and his two sons Mattathias and Judas. Accordingly he invited them to a great banquet, and 'when Simon and his sons had drunk largely, Ptolomee and his men rose up, and took their weapons, and came upon Simon into the banqueting place, and slew him, and his two sons, and certain of his servants. In which doing he committed a great treachery, and recompensed evil for good.' In Dante's judgment, the treachery to them as guests was a more heinous sin

than treachery to them as kinsmen, the reason being, as already explained, that kinship is an involuntary bond of Nature, whereas in friendship and hospitality we create 'a special faith' by our own choice and act.

CANTO
XXXIII
91-187

The punishment of these Traitors to Friends and **Punishment** Guests is distinguished from that of the preceding Rings in three respects. In the first place, there is a perceptible increase of the cold. Although already **The blast grows colder** his face had seemed to have lost all sensibility, Dante appears now to feel the blowing of some wind, and wonders whence it comes. Virgil tells him he will soon see with his own eyes 'the cause which raineth down the blast'—the beating of Lucifer's great bat-like wings which freezes the whole region of Cocytus. The implication is, of course, that we have now reached a deeper degree of cold-blooded treachery, one more immediately inspired by the wind and breath of Satan to create in a human heart 'a special trust,' such as friendship, and then betray it, is almost the blackest, most diabolic sin of which human nature is capable.

The second distinguishing mark of this punish- **The Mask of Ice** ment is that the traitors are frozen in the ice with their faces turned upward. In Caina and Antenora, as we saw, the faces hang down, here the attitude is reversed, and forms a most significant part of the torture. It has, indeed, been suggested that the up-turned face indicates the brazenness of this class of traitors,—so lost to shame that they lift up their faces to Heaven in scorn of concealment. Although Frate Alberigo's willingness to reveal his name and sin seems to favour this interpretation, it is not that

CANTO
XXXIII
91-157
—

given by Dante himself He describes how the upward attitude of the face prevents the tears from escaping freely They lie in the hollows of the eyes and freeze into a mask of ice, and this sealing of the very fountain of tears increases the pent-up anguish within

We passed still further onward, where the ice
Another people ruggedly enswathes,
Not downward turned, but all of them reversed
Weeping itself there suffers them not to weep,
And the grief, which finds a barrier on the eyes,
Turns itself inward to increase the anguish
Because the first tears a cluster make,
And, in the manner of a crystal vizor,
Fill all the cup beneath the eyebrow full ¹

This means not merely, as Plumptre says, 'the induration of feeling and conscience,' but that the desire to weep out their pain lives on when the very power to weep is dead 'One of the wretches of the frozen crust' cries to the travellers,

'O souls, so cruel
That the last post is given unto you,
Lift from my face the solid veils, that I
May vent the sorrow which o'erloads my heart
A little, ere the weeping freeze again' ²

This loss of the gift of tears is the natural issue of so cold-blooded a sin the very power to weep dies, leaving the heart a frozen fountain of sealed-up misery It reminds us of Byron's cry of agony for the lost power

'Then the mortal coldness of the soul like death itself comes
down
It cannot feel for others' woes, it dare not dream its own ,

¹ *Inf* xxxiii 91-99

² *Inf* xxxiii 109-114

That heavy chill has frozen o'er the fountain of our tears,
And though the eye may sparkle still, 'tis where the ice
appears . . .

CANTO
XXXIII.
91 157

Oh could I feel as I have felt,—or be what I have been,
Or weep as I could once have wept, o'er many a vanished
scene,
As springs in deserts found seem sweet, all blackish though
they be,
So, midst the wither'd waste of life those tears would flow
to me '1

But, in the third place, the peculiar 'privilege' or 'vantage' of Tolomea over other parts of Hell is that oftentimes it does not need to wait like them for the death of the body, before it takes possession of the soul. The traitor who begs Dante to remove the icy veil from his face tells him that in many cases, when a man has been guilty of this particular form of treachery, his soul goes straight to Hell, leaving its body on the earth above, to all appearance alive as before, but in reality inhabited by a devil who rules it till its hour comes. This was the doom of Frate Alberigo himself, who gave him this startling and almost incredible information. He was a member of the family of the Manfredi of Faenza in Romagna, and belonged to the Order of the Jovial Friars, two of whom we have met already in the Moat of the Hypocrites above. His soul was suddenly consigned to this Ring for an act of the most cold-blooded treachery. The story is that in 1284 his younger brother, Manfred, in a dispute concerning the lordship of Faenza, struck him in the face. Alberigo pretended to forgive the insult, and

The 'privi-
lege' of
Tolomea

Frate Alberigo
of Faenza.

¹ *Stanzas for Music*

CANTO
XXXIII
91-157
—

a reconciliation took place In the following year he invited Manfred and his little son to a banquet, supper over, he called out 'Now for the fruit'—a prearranged signal to his servants, who rushed from behind a screen and slew father and son on the spot 'The fruit of Frate Alberigo' became a proverb for treachery, and it is probably to this he alludes when he says to Dante,

'I am he of the fruits of the evil garden,
Who here a date am getting for a fig'

This, says Vernon, 'is a popular expression in Tuscany, and means, to pay off with interest, with usury, and is equivalent in meaning to the familiar proverb, "a Rowland for an Oliver" The fig is the cheapest of Tuscan fruits, whereas the date being imported is more costly Alberigo means, "I get full requital for my crime, in that the sufferings I am undergoing are greater than those I inflicted"' The murder took place in 1285, and as Alberigo was alive in 1300, the ideal date of the poem Dante cries out in astonishment, 'Oh then art thou dead already?'—to which the startling reply is given that of the fate of his body on earth he has no knowledge We saw that while the lost know the future, they are ignorant of the present, the Friar therefore cannot tell whether his body is alive or dead All he can say is that, if it still lives, it is inhabited by a demon¹ In proof of his statement, he points out a soul near him who was well known to Dante—Branca d'Oria of Genoa, whose body may be still on earth among

Branca d'Oria
of Genoa.

¹ *Inf* XXXIII 100-123

the living, but whose soul has been 'wintering' here behind him for many years Dante, knowing that this Genoese was still alive, refuses to believe the incredible tale

CANTO
XXXIII
91 157

'I think,' said I to him, 'that thou deceivest me.
For Branca d'Oria never died at all,
And eats, and drinks, and sleeps, and puts on clothes'

Frate Alberigo assures him, however, that he is speaking the simple truth About 1290, this Branca had invited his father-in-law to a banquet, and treacherously murdered him in order to obtain the post which he held Now, his father-in-law was no other than that Michel Zanche, Governor of Logodoro in Sardinia, whom we found in Canto xxii, immersed in the Moat of Pitch for the sin of Bartrary The Friar assures Dante that the soul of the murdered man had not had time to reach the Pitch until a devil had taken possession of the bodies of Branca and a kinsman who was his accomplice in the deed—their expelled souls at the same moment being planted here in the ice, so swift was Heaven's vengeance on their diabolic treachery Part of the meaning of this we get from the *Convito* In Canzone iii, Dante says of a certain kind of man that he, 'being as one dead, still walks upon the earth', and in his commentary on the verse he asks, 'How is he dead and yet walks?' I answer that he is dead as *man*, but remains as *beast* For, as he explains in the same passage, the brute lives the life of mere sensation, whereas it is the prerogative of man to live by reason once that is abandoned, the human lapses into the beast Hence his description of

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91-157
—

Branca d'Oria 'he eats, and drinks, and sleeps, and puts on clothes'—*i.e.* performs the functions of the mere animal life¹ But this is only the beginning of the fall of these traitors, they have sunk beneath the brute to the demonic Without doubt Dante meant this literally He shared the belief of the Middle Ages in a world of diabolic spirits, who had a mysterious power over humanity He represents demons as waiting to seize the souls of evil men the moment they pass from the body But he believed that this waiting for the hour of death is not always necessary, there is an extreme and diabolic malignity of wickedness which passes the limits of the human and the brute, drives forth the soul before its hour, and surrenders the body into the power of a demon The man, in the Psalmist's words, goes down '*quick* into Hell'² Doubtless Dante connected this belief with the words concerning Judas in *John* xiii 27 'And after the sop Satan entered into him' Judas was traitor to his Host, and all treachery to the faith of hospitality, on the part of either host or guest, turns a man into a fiend Sir James Lacaita draws attention to the injury this passage must have inflicted on Frate Alberigo and Branca d'Oria, by investing them with a weird and terrifying suspicion 'In that superstitious age, the mere suspicion that these two persons were possessed of devils was enough for them to be shunned by every one they sought to approach, and was in fact their moral destruction'³

¹ *Inf* xxxiii 134-157, *Com* iv 7

² *Ps* lv 15

³ *Readings on Inferno*, II 650 651

We saw that Dante treated one of the lost souls of Antenora in a fashion scarcely worthy of himself. His treatment here of Friar Alberigo is even less worthy. When the wretch begged him to lift the veil of ice which his own tears had formed on his upturned face, Dante promised to do so when he had learnt his name

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Dante breaks
faith with
Frate
Alberigo

'If thou wouldst have me help thee,
Tell me who thou art and if I free thee not,
To the bottom of the ice may I have to go!'

that is, of course, to the lowest Ring, 'the last post' of Hell, as the Friar calls it. Mark, first, the ambiguity of the promise. Alberigo naturally understood it to mean 'May I be utterly lost, if I break my word.' But Dante evidently had another meaning in his mind. He knew that in quite another sense he was going 'to the bottom of the ice,' since his journey of necessity carried him thither. In the next place, taking advantage of this ambiguity, Dante actually broke his promise. When the Friar had told his story, he claimed its fulfilment, but claimed it in vain.

'But hitherward now stretch forth thy hand,
Open my eyes', and I did not open them,
And to be rude to him was courtesy

Although Reason in the person of Virgil offers no rebuke of this conduct, we need not hesitate to call it unworthy of Dante. It almost seems as if the wind of Lucifer's wings had chilled his better feelings. The suggestion has, indeed, been made that he broke his promise in kindness. Frate Alberigo,

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being unable to see him, naturally thought he was a lost soul bound for 'the last post' of Hell; but had Dante removed the icy mask he would have seen that he was still alive, and his anguish would have been increased by the thought that the story of his doom would be carried back to earth. This is a singular misunderstanding of the spirit and temper of the poet. He had absolutely no pity on this sin. No faith was to be kept with men who themselves had kept no faith with others. It was almost a duty to repay their treachery in kind, that was the only 'courtesy' due to such as they. It was Dante's very abhorrence of treachery which betrayed him into treachery. 'There is a danger,' says Dean Plumptre, 'lest what seems a righteous indignation against evil—the "doing well to be angry"—should lead us on to an evil like in kind to that which we condemn. Men may become false through their scorn of falsehood, cruel in their hatred of cruelty,' and, we may add, treacherous in their abhorrence of treachery.

The Canto ends with a denunciation of the Genoese as men estranged from every virtue and full of every vice, inasmuch as there was found in Cocytus one of them worthy to be comrade of 'the worst spirit of Romagna.' Longfellow quotes 'the bitter Tuscan proverb' against Genoa: 'Sea without fish, mountains without trees, men without faith, and women without shame.' Wherever he turned, Dante saw the same spectacle. Genoa, Pisa, Romagna, all Italy frozen into one vast Cocytus by treachery to kinsman, country, and friend.

CHAPTER XXIX

CIRCLE IX.—THE LAKE OF COCYTUS TRAITORS

IV. *Giudecca · Traitors to Lords and Benefactors*

At last we have reached the central Ring of Cocytus, the very heart of Hell. Its name Giudecca, from Judas, who betrayed his Master, indicates that it is the prison of Traitors to their Lords and Benefactors¹. The reason why this sin is sunk to the lowest depth is that it is treason against both authority and grace—that rightful authority without which there can be neither unity nor peace in the universe, and that grace which makes a lord load his servant with favours, and admit him to his friendship. As the pilgrims enter the Giudecca, Virgil quotes a line from a Latin hymn of the sixth century, adding to it one word ‘*Vexilla Regis prodeunt—Inferni*,’ ‘the banners of the King of Hell’². It was written by Venantius Fortunatus, Bishop of Poitiers (died 600), and is sung in

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Central Ring
Giudecca
Traitors to
Lords and
Benefactors

‘The Banners
of the King’

¹ Aristotle (*Ethics* ix 7) asks why ‘benefactors are better friends to the recipients of their benefactions than are the recipients to their benefactors,’ and gives three reasons for it. (1) every author is fond of his own work, and a recipient is, so to speak, the work of his benefactor, (2) benefaction is noble, and men delight in those who give them an opportunity of doing noble deeds, (3) we are fond of what costs us trouble, and since it is easier to receive a kindness than to do it, the recipient is less affectionate than the benefactor.

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the Roman Catholic Church during Holy Week.¹ In the hymn, 'the King,' of course, is Christ; and Virgil applies the title in scornful irony to His great rival and antagonist. His banners are the six bat-like wings with which he freezes the whole Lake of Cocytus, and which Dante now discovers vast like the sails of a windmill, seen dimly as through mist or the darkness of twilight.

The Three
Winds from
Satan's Wings.

The almost unspeakable heinousness of this final form of treachery is indicated in two ways. First, the icy blast of the three winds which blew from those great wings was so piercing keen that Dante had to take shelter behind his Guide, and when Virgil withdrew himself from before him, saying, 'Behold Dis!' there were no words in which to tell the chill which struck through him—it must be left to the imagination of the reader.

I died not, and did not remain alive
Thank for thyself now, if thou hast a grain of wit
What I became, being of both deprived

The Souls
embedded in
the Ice

In the next place, the souls guilty of this form of treachery are completely embedded in the ice.

Now was I, and with fear in verse I put it,
There where the shades were wholly covered up,
And glimmered through like straw in glass
Some prone are lying, others stand erect,
This with the head, and that one with the soles,
Another, bow like, face to feet inverts.²

¹ The first verse is

Vexilla regis prodeunt
Fulget crucis mysterium
Quo carne carnis conditor,
Suspendus est patibulo

² *Inf* xxxiv 10-15. 'The meaning of the four positions given in these lines is thus explained. Those who lie flat are such as have

It is possible that Dante, who never encumbers his pictures with meaningless details, had some symbolism in view in these various postures, such as different degrees of guilt, but his leading idea is the final and absolute freezing up of a man's whole nature, produced by this Satanic species of treachery. Down to this point, the immersion is more or less partial, here it is complete. We are told nothing of the feelings of the embedded souls—whether, for instance, like Friar Alberigo, they desired to weep, but had lost the power. Indeed, Dante is so benumbed with the awful sight of Lucifer that he forgets to name any of the traitors over whom he walks.

In the very centre of the midmost Ring,

The Emperor of the kingdom dolorous
From his mid-breast forth issued from the ice,

The 'Emperor'
of Hell

a monstrous and gigantic form. In the first Canto, Dante had called God 'that Emperor who reigns above,' and now in the last, he gives the same imperial title to His great enemy. Towards the end of the Canto, Virgil explains how Lucifer came to be embedded here. When he was cast out of Heaven, he fell on the hemisphere of the earth opposite to our own. The land, which then was all on that side of the world, in order to avoid contact with the Arch-Fiend, fled to this side, the waters of which rushed into the vacant place. So violent was the fall,

betrayed benefactors who were on the same level in society with them. Those who are in a perpendicular position, if they stand head upwards, have been traitors to benefactors inferior to them in station, if head downwards, to such as were superior to them. Those who have betrayed benefactors both inferior and superior to them have both their head and their feet downward, so that they assume the form of an arc. —Rev. H. F. Tozer's *English Commentary*

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that Satan tore a passage to the heart of the earth, and there at the very centre of gravity he has lain ever since, his head and breast pointing to the Northern hemisphere, his legs to the Southern. The soil which he tore up in his fall recoiled and formed the Mount of Purgatory, which is now the only land in the great Southern ocean, and the exact antipodes of Mount Calvary. The conception, of course, is a purely ideal one invented for the action of the poem.¹

His vast
stature

The description of Lucifer himself is horrible in the extreme. His stature is more than gigantic: his arm alone was as much greater than the Giants ranged round Cocytus, as they in turn were greater than the poet. From this measurement many attempts have been made to calculate his height. According to Toynbee, for example, if we take Nimrod as seventy feet, or twelve times Dante's stature, this 'would give about eight hundred and forty feet as the measurement of Lucifer's arm, and consequently (taking the length of the arm to be one-third of the stature) about eight hundred and forty yards as his approximate stature'. In reality, the exact measurement matters little, the idea Dante wishes to emphasize is that the treachery of Lucifer was enormous and monstrous beyond all limits of the human. We saw that the Giants are set as Guardians of Cocytus, to indicate that treachery is a gigantic sin, but the Giants being human, their treachery could never reach the dimensions possible to that of Lucifer. His is to be measured by his

¹ *Inf.* xxxiv. 121-126

angelic nature, by his nearness to God, the greatness of his intellect, the range of his power, and the favour he had received from his Maker. For the same reason, his form is as hideous now as once it was beautiful, on the principle of *Corruptio optimi pessima*. His head had three faces of different colours, and in his three mouths he crunched three sinners—Judas, Brutus, and Cassius, in Dante's regard the blackest traitors of the human race. From his six eyes the tears flowed, and, mingling with the bloody foam which oozed from his mouths, ran down his three chins. Under each face sprang a pair of huge bat-like wings, whose vast flappings froze the whole Lake of Cocytus. It is perhaps as well to give Dante's own words

Oh how great a marvel it appeared to me
When I beheld three faces on his head !
The one in front, and that vermilion was ,
Two were the others, that were joined with this
Above the very middle of each shoulder
And they were joined together at the crest ,
And the right appeared twixt white and yellow ,
The left was such to look upon as those
Who come from where the Nile falls valley-ward
From under each there issued two great wings,
Such as befitting were so great a bird ,
Sails of the sea I never saw so large
No feathers had they, but as of a bat
Their fashion was , and these he flapped about
So that three winds were moved by him
Thereby Cocytus all was frozen ,
With six eyes did he weep, and down three chins
Trickled the tear-drops and the bloody foam
At every mouth he with his teeth did crunch
A sinner, in the manner of a brake,

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So that he three of them tormented thus
 To the one in front the biting was as naught
 Unto the clawing, for at times the back
 Of him utterly stripped of skin remained
 'That soul up there who has the greatest pain,'
 The Master said, 'is Judas Iscariot,
 Who has the head within, and outside plies the legs
 Of the other two, who have their heads beneath,
 The one who hangs from the black jowl is Brutus,
 See how he writhes himself and speaks no word
 And the other is Cassius, who seems so large of limb'¹

Compared
 with Milton's
 Satan.

There will always exist widely divergent opinions of this passage. Some will dismiss it in disgust with Savage Landor's words 'This is atrocious, not terrific or grand'. To others, it is nothing more than a curious piece of mediæval grotesque without any special significance. Many English readers will almost certainly turn to Milton's conception of Satan as nobler and truer. Nevertheless, it is questionable whether Milton is nearer the spiritual reality. Indeed, he himself gives us a hint that he is in substantial agreement with Dante. We are all familiar with the passages in the *Paradise Lost* which set Satan before us shining still and glorious even in his fall.

'His form had not yet lost
 All her original brightness, nor appeared
 Less than Archangel ruined, and the excess
 Of glory obscured' (l. 591-594)

Few seem to remember the passage in Book x (501-584) in which Satan and his peers are suddenly transformed into serpents. He has just returned from his seduction of Man, and has given his Angels

¹ *Inf. xxxiv. 37-67*

a glowing and triumphant account of his success. Instead of the 'universal shout and high applause' which he expected, he is surprised to hear 'a dismal universal hiss, the sound of public scorn'. Then the transformation begins, obviously imitated from the doom of Thieves in the *Inferno*:

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—

'His visage down he felt to sharp and spare,
His arms clung to his ribs, his legs entwining
Each other, till, supplanted, down he fell,
A monstrous serpent on his belly prone,
Reluctant, but in vain, a greater power
Now ruled him, punished in the shape he sinned
According to his doom

Such a passage shows that Dante and Milton are not so far apart, after all, in their conceptions of Satan, the Italian poet simply carries out his with greater thoroughness. Milton has so invested the rebel angel with light and glory, magnanimity and courage, intellect and resourcefulness, that his very fraud and treason seem half-heroic. Dante has not the slightest intention of exalting the devil into a hero, and throwing a nimbus of glory round Satanic treachery, on the contrary, his aim is to reveal it as it is—a thing hideous, monstrous, diabolic, to be abhorred by every faithful and generous heart.

There is no need to deny that Dante drew his Punishment horrible picture from the familiar conception of Satan in the Middle Ages. Indeed, he deliberately adopts it as the means of working out the elaborate moral and spiritual symbolism which we have now to examine in detail. The general principle of Lucifer's punishment is that, in every particular, it is

CANTO
XXXIVReversal of his
first EstateChief of the
Seraphim

the reversal of all he was in Heaven It is therefore necessary to see clearly his original rank. In this Canto he is called 'the creature who had once the beauteous semblance' In *Purg* xii 25, he is spoken of as he 'who was created nobler than any other creature', and in *Par* xix 47, as 'the sum of every creature,' the crown of the whole creation Now, there are nine Orders of Angels in the Hierarchy of Heaven, and the highest of these is that of the Seraphim, of this Order, therefore, Lucifer was the chief It is called 'the circle which most loves and most knows', and it loves most because it knows most—love, according to Dante, being in proportion to the knowledge and vision of God. The Seraphim are the nearest God, as close as a halo to the moon. Dante sees them in Paradise as 'a circle of fire,' and calls them

those flames devout,

Which of their six wings make themselves a cowl—

referring to the six wings with which Isaiah saw the Seraphim cover themselves before the Lord¹ The word Seraph was believed to mean burning—aglow with the Love of God, hence Aquinas says 'the name of Seraphim is not given from love alone, but from excess of love, which the name of heat or burning implies' In early art, this symbolism was indicated by painting the wings of the Seraphim a glowing colour, 'celestial rosy-red, Love's proper hue,' as Milton says of Raphael's smile Further, the Order of Seraphim being nearest God, circle round

¹ *Par* xxviii 16-30, 72, 100 111, ix 77 78 (*Is* vi 2) For the nine Orders of the Angelic Hierarchy see *Par* xxviii 97 139, and *Summa*, l q cxiiv

Him with the greatest swiftness, for all created Intelligences move round their Maker with a rapidity proportioned to their longing for Him Each Order of Angels presides over one of the nine spheres of Paradise That governed by the Seraphim is the highest and widest of the nine—the Crystalline Heaven, called the Primum Mobile or First Movement, which revolves with an inconceivable swiftness in its longing for union with the Tenth Heaven, the Empyrean of motionless peace, the abode of God Himself It is the function of the Seraphim to receive power, light, and love from God, by which to set in motion their sphere, this in its turn transmits these Divine energies to the eighth, the eighth to the seventh, and so down from Order to Order, and Heaven to Heaven, until they reach this earth of ours, the fixed centre of the universe So wide is the sphere of the Seraphim it is their glory and their joy to receive and transmit through Heaven and earth the power, wisdom, and love, from which the whole creation sprang

We are now in a position to see how the punishment of Lucifer is represented by Dante as the exact reverse of all this, his original state, in every particular. There can be little doubt, in the first place, that the three faces represent a Trinity of Evil, which is the infernal antithesis of the Trinity of Good which God is This is not to deny that they may have other meanings, for Dante delights to have many facets to his symbols It is, for instance, quite possible that the three colours of the faces—red, yellow-white, and black—represent the three

The Three
Faces—a
Trinity of Evil

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continents then known, Europe, Asia, and Africa. It is in favour of this interpretation that the colour of the left-hand face is expressly connected with Africa

The left was such to look upon as those
Who come from where the Nile falls valley-ward,¹

that is, from Ethiopia. On this view, the meaning is that the treachery of Satan infects the whole world in every continent of it. He is called 'the evil Worm which pierces through the world,' the figure being that of a worm eating its way through an apple. This, however, though quite possible and true, is a secondary meaning. The primary significance must be that which flows directly out of the sin of Lucifer. His sin was pride—pride which refused to be dependent on his Maker for power, wisdom, and love, and aimed at becoming God himself. Now, we have seen that the Deity is a Trinity in which Power is the attribute of the Father, Wisdom of the Son, and Love of the Spirit. It is, therefore, the natural penalty that the Seraph who 'first turned his back upon his Maker,'² and in his pride sought to make himself a God, should lose all part and lot in this Trinity of Divine attributes, and become a Trinity of the diabolic attributes of Impotence, Ignorance, and Hatred. The burning Seraph, glowing once with the very Love of God, now bears for ever the crimson face of Hate, the strong Angel who moved 'the greatest of the spheres of Paradise, is now stricken with the sickly white-and-yellow of Impotence, which can only

¹ *Inf.* xxxiv. 44-45

² *Par.* ix. 128

flap its helpless wings, the seraphic Intellect, whose vision pierced most deeply into the Uncreated and Eternal Light, now looks out upon a darkened world, with a face black as the benighted Ethiopian's. And the three faces which thus represent this infernal Trinity of Impotence, Ignorance, and Hatred, meet, says Dante, in the 'crest' above—the crest of pride in which they find their unity¹

This interpretation of the faces determines the meaning of the three winds set in motion by the three pairs of wings. Dante is careful to connect each pair with one of the faces 'under each there issued forth two great wings', each pair therefore sends out a wind corresponding to its face. In other words, the whole region is frozen into solid ice by the three winds of Impotence, Ignorance, and Hatred. It has been suggested that this is the antithesis of the Spirit of God moving on the face of the waters at the Creation, or on the human heart with the warm life-giving breath of Love. Doubtless this is true, but it is equally certain that Dante meant it also as the direct reversal of the function of Lucifer in his first estate. That function, as we saw, was to receive from God, and transmit to the entire universe beneath him, the Divine Power, Wisdom, and Love, and having proved faithless to this high and glorious office, his doom is to have it reversed—to transmit to traitors like himself the infernal opposites of these attributes. In the same

The Three
Winds from
the Three
Pairs of
Wings

¹ The political interpretation of Rossetti may be mentioned 'the front face, red, is Rome, the chief seat of the Guelphs, Florence, the seat of the *Neri*, would be the black face, and France, from its device of the white and golden lilies, would be the white and yellow face.'

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way the ice is to be explained. it is the direct antithesis of his former power to kindle others into a flame of love St Thomas Aquinas, taking fire as the symbol of the Seraphim, says that the active power of fire, which is heat, signifies 'the influence of this kind of Angels which they exercise powerfully on those beneath them, exciting them to a sublime fervour, and thoroughly purifying them by burning'¹ When, in the highest Heaven, the Empyrean, Dante saw the snow-white Rose of the redeemed, which is the true antithesis of this Cocytus, all Orders of Angels were employed as ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation 'They had their faces all of living flame, and wings of gold

When they descended into the flower, from rank to rank
They proffered of the peace and of the ardour
Which by the fanning of their sides they won²

This is in direct contrast to the fanning of Lucifer's wings Instead of gold, they are in fashion as a bat's, the creature of night and darkness Instead of 'peace and ardour,' they breathe forth the icy blasts of agony and death³

¹ So Dionysius the Areopagite *On the Heavenly Hierarchy*, vii 1 'The appellation of Seraphim plainly teaches their ever moving around things Divine, and constancy and warmth, and keenness, and the seething of that persistent, indomitable, and inflexible perpetual motion, and the vigorous assimilation and elevation of the subordinate, as giving new life and rekindling them to the same heat, and purifying through fire and burnt-offering and the light like and light shedding characteristic which can never be concealed or consumed, and remains always the same, which destroys and dispels every kind of obscure darkness See also *Summa*, i q cxiiv a 5

² *Par* xxxi 1318

³ In *Purg* viii 57 42, when Sordello tells Dante that the serpent is about to appear in the Valley of the Princes, the mere fear of him froze the poet

Whereupon I, who knew not by what road,
Turned round about and closely drew myself
Utterly frozen, to the faithful shoulders (i.e. of Virgil)

It is in this idea of reversal, also, that we must look for the meaning of the 'little sphere' mentioned in line 116. When Virgil, as we shall see presently, carries Dante down the shaggy side of Lucifer and turns with him into a new hemisphere, the poet is at a loss to know where he is. He sees the monster's legs now where, as he imagined, his body was. Virgil explains that they are now on the other side of the centre of gravity, and adds,

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The 'little
sphere' of the
Giudecca.

'Thou hast thy feet upon a little sphere,
Which forms the other face of the Giudecca.'¹

In other words, the Giudecca is a little sphere, on one side ice, on the other rock, fixed immovably at the very centre of gravity, and embedded in it is Lucifer, his head protruding into the Northern hemisphere, his feet into the Southern. This 'little sphere' is what his pride has brought him to, and the fall is to be measured only by the other sphere which once was his. We saw that he was Prince of the Seraphim, the highest Order of Angels, who move and govern the highest and greatest of the nine spheres of Paradise. There can be no doubt that the two spheres stood in direct and intentional antithesis in Dante's mind. We find the same idea in Mercury, the second Heaven. There Dante saw the spirits of men who on earth achieved great deeds, but achieved them through love of their own fame. For this pride, their Heaven is small, for Mercury is 'the smallest star of heaven'.² The inveterate delusion of pride is that it makes us great, in reality, it destroys the very capacity of greatness. The Seraph for whose

¹ *Inf* xxxiv 116-117

² *Par* vi 112, *Cont* li 14

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boundless pride the widest sphere of Paradise was all too narrow, now lies frozen in 'a little sphere' of ice and rocks His Crystalline Heaven moved, and he with it, with an inconceivable and fiery swiftness in its yearning for God, now his hatred of Him has frozen him into absolute motionlessness—his wings flapping helplessly in a vain struggle to escape The agony of all he has lost, of all he has doomed himself to, gushes from his eyes Once his joy was the greatest of all creatures, for joy is in proportion to love, and love to the vision of God The vision is now darkened for ever, he has 'foregone the good of intellect,' and the loss is 'most bitter and full of every sadness'

It is for these reasons that Dante represents Satan in this hideous, enormous, and monstrous form. In every point, it is the complete reversal of the beauty and glory of his first estate Dante felt that such unspeakable treachery *must* work this horrible transformation in character, and that no milder doom was adequate for ingratitude which so basely repaid the highest love and favour God had bestowed on any of His creatures 'How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning' 'Thou, type of resemblance, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty, didst dwell among the delights of the Paradise of God'¹

**Cocytus, the
Sink of Hell**

There remains one last point in which Dante seems to hint that the punishment of Satan, great as it is, is not yet full. The majority of the traitors in the Giudecca are completely embedded in the ice like

¹ *Is* xlv 12, *Ezek* xxviii 12 13 (Vulgate, quoted in *Letter* x 27, and expressly regarded as spoken concerning Lucifer)

straws in glass. Why, then, is the Arch-traitor left partially free? Dante gives no direct answer to such a question, but he seems to hint that this partial freedom is gradually growing less and less. We saw that all the rivers of Hell, formed by the sins, sorrows, and tears of Time, flow down to Lucifer. Acheron, the joyless river of Death, Styx, the murky lagoon of anger and sullenness, Phlegethon, the hot blood of passionate sins, all drain down to form Cocytus, the frozen Lake of cold-blooded treachery, the central sink of Hell. Nay, even from the eternal world on the other side there comes a slender rill, which seems to be the River of Lethe from the top of Mount Purgatory—sins forgiven of God and forgotten, flowing back to their Satanic source. In this, Lucifer is the direct antithesis of God. As flame by its own nature rises into the air, so all holy spirits mount up to God, the source of all their goodness, and, on the contrary, all sinners and their sins flow down like streams of water to him who is the author of all evil. It seems to follow that gradually the sink of Cocytus will be filled up, until at last, when all the sins and sorrows of Time have drained into it, Lucifer will be completely frozen in, and his punishment fulfilled by the return upon himself of all the evil into which he tempted and betrayed both men and angels.

We saw that Lucifer is crunching in his three mouths the three men whom Dante regarded as the blackest traitors of whom history bears record. The meaning which lies upon the surface is that traitors hate and devour each other. 'Devil with devil damned firm concord holds,' writes Milton,

Satan divided
against him
self

CANTO
XXXIVThe Four Arch
TraitorsDegrees of
Guilt and
Penalty

but Dante better understands the nature of devils. Satan's kingdom is divided against itself, it has no loyalty to bind its treacherous citizens together. This impossibility of unity and concord is emphasized by the application of the title 'Emperor' to Satan. For to Dante, as he contends in the *De Monarchia*, the Emperor was the Divinely appointed head and guide of humanity in things temporal, under whom the whole race was to be gathered together in one; but here was a self-appointed Emperor, who devoured those who served him best. This central group, in short, represents that infernal treason which breaks up the unity of both Heaven and earth. In Heaven, Lucifer rebelled against God, on earth, Judas betrayed His Son, and Brutus and Cassius treacherously murdered that Cæsar whom Dante regarded as God's representative in temporal things. The four, therefore, represent treason against God and Christ in Church and State—the violation of the deepest and holiest bonds which unite mankind, and the symbol of this disunion is the Arch-traitor championing his fellow-traitors in his savage foaming mouths.

We can, in a general way, distinguish the various degrees of guilt and punishment assigned to the four. As we have seen, by far the heaviest judgment is inflicted on him who was the highest of all God's creatures. Judas comes next as traitor to Christ he occupies the central mouth, his head is inside, and time after time his back is laid bare by the claws of the monster. Brutus and Cassius, as traitors against the Emperor, suffer a somewhat milder torment.

their heads hang down outside, and their backs escape the tearing of the claws Brutus is regarded by Dante as the blacker traitor of the two, since he has put him in the black left-hand mouth, the left being invariably the place of greater guilt

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When we pass beyond this general distinction, we find ourselves to a large extent in the region of conjecture Why, for instance, is Brutus set in the black mouth, and Cassius in the white-and-yellow one? Part of the reason, as we saw, is that the one mouth is on the left, the other on the right Both Brutus and Cassius were under deep obligations of gratitude to Cæsar After the battle of Pharsalia, he pardoned both, and advanced them to important public offices For Brutus he did more At this battle he gave orders to his officers to save him if he surrendered, and if he refused, to let him escape with his life After his surrender he made him one of his chief friends, and had the utmost confidence in his loyalty According to the well-known story, it was when Cæsar saw the dagger of his friend Brutus directed against him that he threw his gown over his head, and resigned himself to his fate It is for this that Brutus hangs from the left-hand mouth, suffering from the teeth of Satan, as it were, the wounds he had inflicted on his friend, for although Cassius was the originator of the conspiracy and drew him into it, Brutus was under far deeper obligations of friendship and gratitude So far all is clear, we understand the meaning of right and left The meaning of the colours is much more difficult Let us start from the interpretation of them already

Brutus and
Cassius.

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given the black face means Ignorance, the white-and-yellow Impotence. The meaning then is that their treachery reduced Brutus to Ignorance and Cassius to Impotence. At first sight, this may not seem an appropriate penalty, but the reason for it lies in the character of the two men. There can be no doubt that one chief motive of Cassius was love of power, according to Plutarch, indeed, he was embittered because Caesar had given the prætorship of the city to Brutus instead of himself. If this was Dante's view of Cassius, it would account for his hanging him out of the mouth of the white-and-yellow face—the man who played the traitor for power is thereby reduced to everlasting impotence. Brutus, however, was an entirely different man. Even his enemies did not accuse him of personal aims or love of power. It was his well-known uprightness which gave the conspiracy its strength. He was a student and philosopher, and had the reputation of great wisdom. Is it not probable that Dante hung him there in that black mouth which means the darkness of ignorance, to indicate that such black treachery as his turns the wisest man into a fool—as, indeed, his name, Brutus, means? To Dante, who believed with the intensity almost of a religious conviction that Caesar was Roman Emperor by Divine right, nothing could seem a greater folly or ignorance than for a man to imagine that he could frustrate the will of God by a treacherous blow.

Compared
with Cato of
Utica

This terrible doom of Brutus and Cassius has always been felt to be a difficulty in face of the

fact that Dante makes Cato the Guardian of Mount Purgatory. For Cato was as determined an opponent of Cæsar as they, and committed suicide rather than submit to his rule. This last desperate act Dante regarded as his crowning virtue, the man who 'chose to pass out of life a free man, rather than without liberty to abide in life,' was worthy to be the Guardian of the Mount of Liberty.¹ The contrast between his doom and that of Brutus and Cassius is not completely accounted for by Dante's political theory, as set forth in the *De Monarchia*, that the Roman Emperor was the appointed representative of God on earth, for this would equally condemn Cato's opposition to Cæsar's authority. The true reason is moral, not political. Brutus and Cassius murdered in foulest treachery the man who had been their friend and benefactor, and Dante swept aside in scorn their claim that they did it in the name of liberty. Treachery can never be so justified, the true lover of liberty was the man who fought openly and honestly, and, when the fight went against him, took not Cæsar's life but his own, rather than submit to what, however mistakenly, he regarded as slavery.

Judas Iscariot occupies the central mouth as the greatest traitor of the three, the betrayer of the Christ Himself. This red face, as we saw, is the symbol of Hatred, the antithesis of that Love of God with which Lucifer glowed and burned in his first

¹ *De Mon.* ii. 5. Brutus and Cassius also were suicides, after their defeat at Philippi, they destroyed themselves rather than fall into the hands of Octavius. Plutarch tells that immediately before his death Brutus said 'It is an infinite satisfaction to me that all my friends have been faithful.' He little thought he himself would be held up as the blackest of traitors to his friend.

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Peculiarities
of his Punish-
ment

estate That Judas is thrust into this red mouth probably means that his great sin was against the same Love of God, as it had manifested itself in Christ—the Love which chose him as an Apostle, and bore patiently with his growing treachery up to the kiss in the garden and the last appeal, ‘Friend, wherefore art thou come?’ Probably too it means that the Love he had betrayed has utterly departed from him, and that now he is devoured by a passionate hatred of Christ. His punishment differs in two particulars from that of his fellow-traitors: his head is inside the mouth, and his back is so mercilessly torn by Lucifer’s claws that at times the backbone is laid bare. This is no meaningless crunching and tearing, but the exact return of his treachery upon himself. The flaying of his back is repayment of that scourging to which he delivered his Lord, just as Caiaphas and the Sanhedrists receive the crucifixion to which they handed Him over. Similarly, the devouring of the head may be meant to correspond to the crown of thorns which his treachery set upon the head of his Master, or, as it has been suggested, it is the infernal return to himself of the kiss by which he betrayed Him. And there he hangs for ever as his Master hung, or perhaps as he himself hung when he ‘went and hanged himself’—his self-destruction lengthened out into an endless torture¹

¹ In lines 58-59 we are told that the biting was as nothing compared with the tearing of the claws. It is difficult to understand why. If the head in Satan’s mouth is an allusion to the suicide of Judas by hanging, and the flaying of his back the return on himself of the scourging to which he delivered his Master, the idea would be that his treachery to Christ produced a greater torture than did his own self-destruction.

CHAPTER XXX

THE CONVERSION OF DANTE

WE now approach the end of the long and dreary pilgrimage Virgil does not allow much time for gazing on the monstrous form of the fallen Seraph.

CANTO
XXXIV.
68-129

Departure
from Hell.

'But night is reascending, and 'tis time
That we depart, for we have seen the whole'

The difficulty is to find a thoroughfare, for their journey seems to have landed them in a *cul-de-sac* at the exact centre of gravity in the heart of the earth To avoid the necessity of retracing their steps through all the dark Circles, and thus marring the symbolism, Dante has left open the passage in the other hemisphere which Lucifer tore asunder when he fell from Heaven like lightning The way in which they gain this passage on the other side of the 'little sphere' of the Giudecca, seems at first sight a piece of pure grotesquery At Virgil's request, Dante clasps him round the neck Watching his opportunity when Lucifer's wings are widespread, Virgil lays hold of his shaggy sides and scrambles down among the thick hair as on the rungs of a ladder, between the monster's body and the crust of ice which froze it in When they reach the place

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CANTO
XXXIV
68-138
—

'where the thigh revolves exactly on the thickness of the haunch,' Virgil, 'with labour and with hard-drawn breath,' turns his head where his feet had been, and begins climbing up the leg, grappling by the tufted hair. They issue at last through an opening in a rock, and after seating Dante on the edge, Virgil cautiously steps towards him—the caution evidently being necessary for fear of falling back. At first, Dante is utterly bewildered, seeing Lucifer's legs stretching above him, instead of his body; but he learns that the somersault was the passing of the centre of gravity, and that now they are in the opposite hemisphere and hold their heads to other stars.

Symbolism
The Crisis of
Dante's Con-
version

In all this, Dean Plumptre sees nothing but 'the extremest point of grotesqueness', but the passage cannot be dismissed so lightly. It is surely obvious that by the somersault at the centre of gravity Dante means to indicate the great crisis of conversion, the decisive turning-point of his moral and spiritual life. Beatrice, when she meets him afterwards on the top of Mount Purgatory, declares that the object of the whole journey through Hell is just to produce this conversion

'So low he fell, that all arguments
For his salvation were already short,
Save showing him the people of perdition'¹

It is most unlikely that Dante, who carries his symbolism into the minutest details, should turn his escape from Hell into a mere feat of grotesque gym-

¹ *Purg* xxx 136-138

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nastics. We are not left to conjecture, however; for he gives us a clear hint that this passing of the central point is symbolic:

CANTO
XXXIV.
68-120
—

And if I then became distressed,
Let the gross people think who do not see
What the point is which I had passed

It is symbolically the central point of all evil, 'the point to which all gravities are drawn from every side'—the gravities of sin that fall away from God. The passing of this point is by far the most decisive and important thing that has yet happened to Dante. It is his personal conversion. Hitherto, during the thirty-five years of his life, he has been sinking deeper and deeper away from God, carried down by the weight of his sin, now that he has turned at the very centre of gravity, every step will lessen the heavy load, for every step is back to God and Paradise.¹

This being so, many of the details grow morally significant, which otherwise seem little more than grotesque fancies. For example, it cannot be without meaning that this conversion is accomplished, in part at least, by the aid of Lucifer himself. As they grappled his shaggy sides,

The Satanic
Stairway

'Keep fast thy hold, for by such stairs as these,'
Said the Master, panting like a man forespent,
'Must we perforce depart from so great evil.'²

This might mean, of course, that no other path of escape was open to them, but it is much likelier to

¹ *Inf.* xxxiv 91-93, 110-111. It is pointed out that it is an error, scientifically, to say that gravity is greatest at the centre of the earth. The physical error, however, lends itself to the moral symbolism.

² *Inf.* xxxiv 82-84.

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XXXIV
68-139
—

be Dante's symbolic way of saying that he used Satan as a means of escape from Satan. This is precisely the idea expressed by Beatrice in the words quoted above. Dante's conversion was accomplished by his seeing 'the people of perdition,' by a resolute contemplation of sin and its penalties—in other words, by Satan and his realm. It was on the stairway of the Devil himself, so to speak, that he climbed into the new life in Christ. Doubtless many a soul is drawn gently, almost insensibly, by the love of God, but not thus, according to his own testimony, did the greatest spirit of the Middle Ages enter the Kingdom. Fear of 'the wrath to come' was burned into his very soul. From Circle to Circle he had to pass with fear and trembling, every form of human sin and penalty he had to face with open eyes, and finally, he had to grapple with the Emperor of all that kingdom of woe, and make him the wild pathway to the better life. However it might be with others, Dante felt that such were the stairs by which he 'must perforce depart from so great evil.

Fear of Hell,
reasonable

Nor will Dante admit any baseness in such fear, let superfine moralists say what they will. For in making his escape he clasps the neck of Virgil, and it is Virgil who turns with him into a new hemisphere. Since Virgil, as we have so often seen, is Reason personified, the symbolic meaning is surely that conversion even through fear is the act of Reason. The fear of Hell may be nothing more than 'a hangman's whip,' but to Dante it is the only right and rational thing for any man who under-

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stands what sin is. Its penalties are no arbitrary ones; they are invariably the necessary and inevitable, because natural, recoil of evil on the sinner's own soul and character. What this recoil is, he tries to show in symbolic forms—the gradual narrowing down of the soul to its one master sin, and to have a wholesome terror of this ruinous recoil was to his mind an act of supreme Reason. Hence he chooses the wisest Reason of antiquity as his guide through the awful prison-house of sin, and clasps him round the neck to be carried by him, when he turns his back upon it for ever.

CANTO
XXXIV.
68-129
—

Dante tells us, further, that conversion is no easy task, no child's play. Even Virgil, the highest human wisdom, turned at the central point 'with labour and with hard-drawn breath,' and afterwards climbed 'panting like a man forespent.' After the long nightmare of horror and suffering through which he had passed, we might imagine that Dante would have turned away from sin with an eagerness which knew no fatigue, in its anxiety to escape from its power, but sin and Hell, he found, are not so easily shaken off. Even when a man's reason is utterly convinced of the unspeakable folly, misery, and evil of sin, he may have a long and exhausting struggle, before he can finally turn his back upon it. Long habits of evil have lowered the moral vitality, and the charm of remembered pleasures, now that they are about to be abandoned for ever, doubles its allurements and weakens the soul with vain longings. We are reminded of the solicitations of old habits of sin which assailed St. Augus-

Conversion, a
struggle

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CANTO
XXXIV.
68-129

tine in the very crisis of conversion: 'Toys of toys, and vanities of vanities, my old loves held me back, and made my fleshly garment quiver—whispering softly, "Dost thou leave us? and from *that* moment shall we never be with thee any more? And from *this* moment will not this and that be allowed thee for ever?"'¹ The struggle, however, is sorest at the turning-point, once the crisis is past every upward step becomes easier. On the Mount of Purgatory the toil of climbing lessens with every Terrace won, every sin conquered.

Conversion
only the
beginning
of 'a longer
stairway'

This brings us to another point of which Dante was intensely conscious, namely, that conversion is but the beginning of a vast journey—not, as many seem to think, the final goal. When the turning was accomplished, Virgil seated Dante on the margin of the rocky opening from which they had emerged, but only for a moment

'Rise up,' the Master said, 'upon thy feet,
The way is long, and difficult the road,
And now the sun to middle-tierce returns.'

Once before, when Dante sank down exhausted with his climb out of the Moat of the Hypocrites, we saw that Virgil roused him with similar words:

'A longer stairway it behoves thee mount.
'Tis not enough from these to have departed'²

No man, surely, ever had a greater conception of the range and scope of the moral and spiritual life. The seven deadly sins must first be purged out, and the corresponding virtues won, by severe pain

¹ *Confessions*, Bk VIII chap xl.

² *Inf.* xxxiv 94-96, xxiv 46-47

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and discipline. Even then, nothing is gained but an Earthly Paradise on the top of the Mount of Purification, that state of natural virtue from which man fell; and far beyond it, Heaven climbing over Heaven, rises the Paradise of God and His presence. The *Inferno*, with which so many readers stop, is but the crisis of conversion; the *Purgatorio* is the purification of the soul from its habitual sins, and the *Paradiso* is the gaining of the virtues which constitute Heaven, and give the Beatific Vision

CANTO
XXXIV.
68-129
—

Finally, Dante tells us that though conversion is but the painful turning of the soul toward that infinite eternal life, he was conscious in a moment that he was in a new world. In the hemisphere he had just left, it was night, and Virgil tells him that in an instant he had passed into the morning 'and now the sun to middle-tierce returns'. The mere mention of the sun signifies a new world. All through the *Inferno*, time is indicated by the moon, which is regarded as the queen of that realm of night.¹ They have come now into a world in which the sun, the natural symbol of God, marks the time, and not only time in general, but the hours of worship, as is indicated by the reference to 'middle-tierce.' The Roman Catholic Church divides the day into four principal parts for purposes of worship, of which the first is *tierce*, from six to nine in the morning, and of these Dante makes a mystical use in the *Commedia*, the key to which is found in his *Convito*. There he tells us that noon is the hour of greatest nobility and virtue, hence it is at noon that he

¹ *Inf.* x. 79-80

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XXXIV
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—

The putting-
back of the
clock.

enters the Celestial Paradise. At sunset he descended into Hell, and at sunrise he emerged on the shore of Mount Purgatory. There is, however, some uncertainty as to the particular hour meant by 'middle-tierce.' Taken as the exact mid-way between six and nine, it is, of course, half-past seven, but in the *Convito*, Dante expressly says that the bell rings for this office of the Church toward the close of the third hour of the day, which is therefore called 'middle-tierce'¹ This would make it about half-past eight. So far as one can see, however, no symbolic meaning hangs upon the exact hour. A question of more importance is whether the sudden transition from night in one hemisphere to morning in the other, involves the putting of the clock back or forward. If we remember the mystical chronology of the pilgrimage, the putting of it back is the only thing possible. The pilgrims enter Hell at sunset on Good Friday, and the journey of all the Circles takes twenty-four hours, which brings us to Saturday night. The next morning is Easter Sunday, and, as Dr Moore says, it is intolerable to think that Dante spent that day of all days of the year, groping his way in the heart of the earth. If the clock was put back, thus 'redeeming the time,' space would be left for the

¹ *Conv* iv 23. 'The Church uses the temporal hours in the division of the day, which consists of twelve hours, long or short, according to the amount of sun. And because the sixth hour, that is, noon, is the most noble of the whole day, and has the most virtue, the Church approaches her offices as near to it as she can from either side, that is, both *before* and *after*. Therefore the office of the first part of the day, that is, *tierce*, is said toward the close of that part, and those of the third and fourth parts toward their beginning. And therefore we say *middle-tierce* before it rings for this division.'

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climb of almost twenty-four hours, and they would rise with Christ on the morning of Easter Sunday. For, whatever be the literal chronology, this is certainly the mystical one. Dante's intention is without doubt to make his journey parallel with the crucifixion and resurrection of his Lord. On the night of Good Friday he 'descended into Hell' with Christ; on the morning of Easter day he rose with Him into newness of life. This mystical parallelism is broken unless the clock is put back four-and-twenty hours. 'Like the Redeemer of mankind, Dante has been dead and buried part of three days, and it is not yet daybreak on Easter Sunday, "in the end of the Sabbath when it began to dawn towards the first day of the week," when he 'issued forth to rebehold the stars.'¹ It is for this reason that he here connects his escape from Hell with the death of Christ. 'Now,' says Virgil,

'thou art arrived beneath the hemisphere
Opposed to that which overcanopies the great
Dry land, and beneath whose summit was consumed
The Man Who without sin was born and lived.'²

The dry land is the Northern Hemisphere, the centre of which Dante regarded as Jerusalem. As the city which had crucified Christ, the sinless Man, it was morally appropriate that the Inferno should be set directly underneath it. When Dante passes into the other hemisphere, he has dissociated himself from that crime against Christ, nevertheless he knows well that through it alone has his salvation become possible. Beneath the Cross stretches in a

CANTO
XXXIV.
88-130
—

¹ E. G. Gardner, *Dante*, p. 101.

² *Inf.* xxxiv. 112-115.

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CANTO
XXXIV.
68-139

The Mystical
Stairway

straight unbroken line the mystical stairway which leads to God. All the dark Circles of Hell, this dim and rugged passage in the other hemisphere, every Terrace of Mount Purgatory, and every starry Heaven of Paradise these form the steps of the great spiritual ladder which stretches straight from the Cross of Calvary to the snow-white Rose of the Redeemed, and on this stairway Dante shares the great experiences of his Lord—Death, Resurrection, and Ascension to glory.

The dark
journey up to
'the bright
world.'

Of the journey to the surface we are not told much, probably because little can be told of the state of mind which immediately succeeds the agitating crisis of conversion. It appears to have occupied almost as long as the pilgrimage through Hell, for it is sunrise when they emerge. The passage itself was no 'palace corridor,' but a 'natural dungeon' of rock, with rugged uneven floor, and void of light. Doubtless it is symbolic of the period of darkness and struggle which is natural to one who has just turned to the new and better life. The most notable thing in this long gloomy passage is an unseen rivulet which flows down the whole length of it in a dark hollow beside their path:

A place there is below, from Beelzebub removed
As far a distance as his tomb extends,
Which not by sight is known, but by the sound
Of a small rivulet, which there descendeth
By the hollow of a rock which it has eaten out
With course which winds about and slightly falls.¹

Lethe

This small rivulet is usually identified with Lethe,

¹ *Inf* xxxiv. 127-132. For Lethe, see *Purg* xxviii, xxxi. 91-105.

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but properly speaking it is not the river itself but the sins which it washes away into forgetfulness. This, for instance, is the reason why the brooklet is hidden from sight in the dark hollow of its rocky course, and why Cato speaks of it as 'the blind river.'¹ The sins purged away on Mount Purgatory are in very truth forgotten, hidden from every eye, remembered neither by the sinner himself nor by his fellows. But though forgotten, they have not gone out of existence, they are making their way down to him from whom they came. The winding of the rivulet represents the tortuous course of sin, and the slowness of the fall probably the gentle movement of sin when it is forgiven and forgotten. It is no wild cataract like Phlegethon. There is, however, one sad thing about it—its smallness. It is, alas, 'a little brooklet,' for in Dante's belief the sins purged away and forgotten are but a tiny rill, compared with the full flowing of the fourfold River of Hell. Nevertheless, Dante evidently regards the very sound of the unseen rivulet as a comfort in his dark journey: it assures him at least that there is forgiveness and forgetfulness of sin.

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68-139
—

The closing words tell how he regained the upper world, and saw the shining of the Easter stars:

The Easter
Stars

My Guide and I upon that hidden way
Entered to return into the bright world,
And without care of having any rest,
We mounted up, he first and I the second,
So far that through a round opening I saw
Some of the beauteous things which Heaven bears,
And thence we issued forth again to see the stars.²

¹ *Purg.* i. 40

² *Inf.* xxxiv. 133-139

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CANTO
XXXIV.
98-139

As every reader of the *Commedia* knows, each of its three divisions ends with the word 'stars,' but with a distinct progression of spiritual meaning. Here Dante simply sees the stars. From the summit of Mount Purgatory he mounts among them. In the *Paradiso* he becomes one with the power which moves them all

Already my desire and will were turned,
Even as a wheel that equally is moved,
By the Love that moves the sun and the other stars.¹

Now, all through the poem the stars stand for the bright virtues of the Christian life. 'The rays of the four holy lights' shine full upon the face of Cato, the Guardian of the Mount of Purification; they are the four stars of the four cardinal virtues, Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude—never seen in this 'Northern widowed site'² When Dante has drunk of the waters of Lethe, he is led within the dance of four fair maidens, personifications of the same virtues, who say,

'Here we are nymphs, and in the Heaven are stars'³

'To rebehold the stars,' therefore, is to regain the vision of the Christian virtues, long dimmed by years of sin. 'To mount unto the stars' is to rise to the attainment of them. But the Beatific Vision of Him who is the fountain of every virtue comes only when desire and will are turned by the Love which moves the wheel of the whole universe of stars.

¹ *Par.* xxxiii. 143-145.

² *Purg.* I 22-39.

³ *Purg.* xxxi. 106.

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Meantime Dante knows that this final vision is far off—he can see only ‘*some of the beauteous things which Heaven bears*’ Not until, with toil of hands and feet, he has climbed the narrow tortuous clefts of the precipice which rings round the base of the purifying Mount, is he able to see the three radiant stars of the celestial virtues—Faith, Hope, and Love; and even then, these become visible only in the dark and silent night, when the sun and the stars of the natural virtues have sunk beneath the horizon.¹ And far beyond and above, veil after veil of sense and sin must fall from his eyes before they can bear the full splendour of the whole Heaven of starry virtues, and of Him who gives them all their light.

CANTO
XXXIV.
68-139
—

¹ *Purg* viii 85 93,

‘ Nel beato concilio
Ti ponga in pace la verace corte,
Che me rilega nell’ eterno esilio ’

Purgatorio, XXI 16-18

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